UNIVERSITY *of* TASMANIA

Gay Neo-tribes: An Exploration of Space and Travel Behaviour

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta

BProf (Vilnius University of Applied Sciences)

BSc (University of Southern Denmark)

Tasmanian School of Business and Economics

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by any other person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

Signed: _____ Date: 19th January, 2017

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta

Statement of ethical conduct

The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University. The research was approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Reference Number: H14212).

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Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta

Statement of co-authorship

The following people and institutions contributed to the publication of work undertaken as part of this thesis:

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta, Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, University of Tasmania

Dr Anne Hardy, Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, University of Tasmania

Dr Brady Robards, School of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania

Author details and their roles

Paper 1

Vorobjovas-Pinta, O and Hardy, A 2014, 'Rethinking Gay Tourism: A Review of Literature', *CAUTHE 2014: Tourism and Hospitality in the Contemporary World: Trends, Changes and Complexity*, 10 to 13 February 2014, Brisbane, pp. 635-644.

This paper is located in Chapter 3.

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta was the primary author and primary contributor to the paper. Dr Anne Hardy assisted with refinement and presentation in her supervisory capacity.

Paper 2

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This paper is located in Chapter 6.

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This paper is located in Chapter 7.

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta was the sole author on this paper.

Paper 5

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This paper is located in Chapter 8.

Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta was the sole author on this paper.

We the undersigned agree with the above stated "proportion of work undertaken" for each of the above published (or submitted) peer-reviewed manuscripts contributing to this thesis:

Signed: _____

Dr Anne Hardy
Primary Supervisor
Tasmanian School of
Business and Economics
University of Tasmania

Signed: _____

Dr Stuart Crispin
Head of School
Tasmanian School of
Business and Economics
University of Tasmania

Date: 19th January, 2017

Abstract

Academic research into the experiences and desires of gay travellers has not kept pace with societal change and transformation. There is a dearth of inquiry that explores gay travellers' sense of connectedness to other gay travellers, the spaces or locations they share, and the activities that are particular to the broad umbrella of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) tourists. This PhD by publication seeks to address this gap by drawing on the concept of the 'neo-tribe' as one way of conceptualising belonging, connectedness, and affinity for travellers identifying as gay.

This thesis argues neo-tribal theory offers a powerful means to explore the social aspects of travel. In the literature, neo-tribes are defined as fluid groupings of people who come together from different walks of life. This thesis posits that there are four fundamental aspects to a neo-tribe: a) shared sentiment, b) rituals and symbols, c) fluidity in membership, and d) space. Significantly, it makes a theoretical contribution by establishing the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. A deepened understanding of this phenomenon is critical, as the importance of gay space to the gay community has already been acknowledged in the present body of literature examining gay travel.

Within tourism studies this thesis also makes significant contributions through its application of neo-tribal theory and demonstration that the concept offers an alternative to traditional segmentation studies. While the concept has gained prominence in sociological studies, it has been applied less extensively in tourism and leisure research. This is surprising as neo-tribalism offers many opportunities to expand existing knowledge of gay travellers, especially in terms of their behaviour, motivations and experiences.

The fieldwork undertaken for this research took place in an exclusively gay and lesbian resort in Far North Queensland, Australia in September and October 2014. Ethnographic methods including semi-structured interviews and participant observation were leveraged to gain a close record and understanding of the resort's visitors, who were predominantly gay men. The data that resulted from these methods were used to build understanding of whether these travellers constituted a neo-tribe, using the four aforementioned aspects. Significantly, the intimate relationship between a LGBT minority-majority tourist community and the secluded environs of the resort demonstrated the power of the spatial element as the linking value between these disparate elements of neo-tribal identity.

Drawing upon the findings, this manuscript asserts that neo-tribal theory adds new and valuable insights into our understanding of gay travellers, in terms of their behaviour, motivations and experiences. Space transcends the mere framing of neo-tribal experience; it is the fulcrum of neo-tribal assembly and life, and it mediates the other characteristics of tribal identity. The spatial characteristic becomes transformed through a paradigm of shared ownership into the very substance that holds the neo-tribe together. These findings establish that without space as this shared currency, the other three elements of neo-tribes can have no collective form, and that the tribal identity will dissipate.

In memory of my beloved Omma.

Laipna dzīve Saulainē!

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During the past four years there have been so many people who helped me with this project. I wish to express my most sincere gratitude and appreciation for these people here.

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I would also like to thank my co-supervisors – Dr Brady Robards and Dr Gemma Lewis. Brady, thank you for stepping in after I was one year into my PhD. Your expertise in neo-tribalism was an immense help in shaping my thesis. Thank you for listening and organising PhD meetings at local pubs and other unconventional spaces. I felt comfortable knowing you were just a phone call away. Gemma, thank you for your time and critical thought throughout the course of my PhD. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr Alison Dunn for her assistance and guidance in the early stages of my candidature.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the guests and staff of the resort where I conducted my ethnographic study. Without your generosity and openness this project would not have been possible.

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It has been great four years.

Ačiū!

Paldies!

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1

Prologue

Introduction

There were no road signs, nor bright, vivid, pleading resort billboards along the highway. And all-knowing Siri seemed to be lost as well, off the grid, up here in Far North Queensland. As I drove the tiniest rental car up and down Captain Cook Highway, just me and my bright red Hyundai, I had no way to find my destination other than the brief, cryptic text message I received from the resort manager: '3km past Rex Lookout look for a M30 road sign and after 50m turn right'. I felt like I was trying to find Platform 9¾, except I was lost on the beach. Worse, there was barely any phone signal – every traveller's nightmare. As I learned later, my idyllic and remote destination relies on a satellite phone system, and – cut off from the ease of modernity's ubiquitous, unceasing connectivity – I abruptly felt as if I was adrift in time, as well as space. At the end of a journey of almost eight hours from Hobart, Tasmania, I finally reached my destination: the one and only gay and lesbian resort in Australia. As I entered the reception area I was greeted with a warm salutation: 'Welcome to the family, we've been waiting for you'. Although the tiny building housing the reception desk, and its welcoming occupant, sat right behind the main hotel building towering above it, this space felt distinctly like an inviting gateway to a truly idyllic resort life. As I walked through the reception, and entered the main resort area – the bar, the restaurant, the ocean! – I noticed this space was filled with friendly gay men, all seemingly enjoying perfect relaxation. It felt immediately as though they had known each other for a long time. I soon discovered I was wrong. How do they know each other? I wondered. How did they find this place? Why, of everywhere on Earth, did they travel here?

As I stood there, I felt as though I had stumbled into a hidden utopia, which felt entirely different from what I have experienced before as a traveller, and also as a tour guide serving

the needs of a mass tourism consumer. Maybe I should not have been so surprised: the face of tourism is rapidly changing, and this dynamic industry is driven by forces which are, in many respects, strange and unexpected when compared to our everyday lives. On the other hand, tourism is one of the most substantial and powerful forces shaping our understanding of the world (Higgins-Desbiolles 2006). Tourism is indeed a constantly growing and expanding industry, accounting for 10% of the world's GDP and one in eleven jobs around the world, in 2015 (World Tourism Organisation 2016). The World Tourism Organisation (2016) forecasts that by 2030 international tourist arrivals will surpass 1.8 billion. This projected increase is driven by air travel becoming more accessible and affordable (Weaver & Lawton 2014); already, more than half (54%) of travellers in 2015 reached their destination by air (World Tourism Organisation 2016). The increase in travel is also linked with social and demographic changes, such as increased entitlements to paid leave, a higher proportion of single adults worldwide, and more relaxed working hours (Weaver & Lawton 2014).

For a long time, tourism has been closely associated with mass consumption of pre-packaged holidays at sun-and-beach destinations, which have been marketed aggressively by giant tourism operators (Bramwell 2004). The same demographic shifts driving overall tourism numbers have likewise led to increased demand for more personalised, bespoke and intimate holidays. To the academic field of tourism studies, consumer preference for this more nuanced form of tourism has marked a departure from the era of modernity, and the embrace of postmodern understandings of society (Lew 2008). Poon (1989, p. 93) summarises the emergence, and the importance, of this new era of tourism:

> The economics of the new tourism is very different from the old—profitability no longer rests solely on economies of scale and the exploitation of mass undifferentiated markets.

> Economies of scope, systems gains, segmented markets, designed and customized holidays are becoming more and more important for profitability and competitiveness in tourism.

This is not to suggest that mass tourism has disappeared, but that a plethora of alternative forms to mass tourism have emerged. This is emphasised and reiterated by the concept of 'niche tourism' becoming pervasive in the academic tourism literature in the past decade (Robinson & Novelli 2005). The term 'niche tourism' is frequently viewed as a tailored and individualised form of tourism, which is targeted towards a wealthier, more culturally- and socially-aware, and technologically-savvy tourist, who expects the tourism experience to reflect his or her moral values and worldviews (Morgan & Pritchard 2005; Robinson & Novelli 2005). Gibson (2009) explains that such a tourist, as juxtaposed to the consumer of mass tourism, not only desires an escape from the 'safety bubble' of the homogenised group tour or global chain hotel, but frames his or her exploration as an attempt to make sense of the world, and of his or her own place within it. This interpretation reinforces the core tenet of tourism studies: the travel market is highly differentiated and heterogeneous, and travellers now seek tailored products, services and experiences. Today's travellers select their next holiday based on their set of values, and the particular emotional connotations and personal experiences which draw them to certain destinations and not others. Destinations already capitalise on these emotions, as Morgan and Pritchard (2005, p. 18) explain: 'The battle for customers in tomorrow's destination marketplace will be fought over hearts and minds'.

With global consumption patterns changing quickly, it is an immense challenge for destinations to track the moving target that is the expectations of their consumers, and as such there is a particular demand for means to understand the particular motivations, needs, and behaviours of the new, 'niche' tourist. The essential problem faced by industry is

the absence of sophisticated and fine-grained understandings of the reasons why particular destinations or places attract a particular traveller, and how this can inform the development of the tourism product and the demographic expansion of their markets.

The aggregate effect of these trends is that there are more market segments today than there have been previously, and as such, the coherent, unitary understanding of the 'traveller' can be less adequately quantified and expressed than ever before. There is no reason to believe that this trend will not continue. Consumers are equipped with unprecedented access to information about potential destinations, and ever diminished barriers to their travel. This demands a proliferation of branding, marketing, and careful strategy on the part of tourism providers, to target the increasingly fragmented market for tourism and travel. Traditional tourism research paid attention to readily-accessible measures of travel market segmentation, such as broad demographic and behavioural analysis of travellers at particular destinations (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard 2007; Hardy & Robards 2015). In light of the emergence of new forms of tourism, and a return to individual tastes and needs, there is an urgent need to concentrate on the nuanced and intangible aspects of tourism, such as the need for belonging, tourists' rituals, collective bonding between travellers, and shared senses of sentiment.

Grounded in sociological inquiry, neo-tribal theory provides rich opportunities for delving into the social aspects of tourism and, hence, exploring these situated qualities. A neo-tribe is defined as a collection of people hailing from different walks of life, united through their shared sentiments, rituals, symbols, and kinship (Bennett 1999; Cova & Cova 2002; Goulding & Shankar 2011; Hardy & Robards 2015). Neo-tribal theory can be used as an essential tool for exploring the sensitivities inherent to a particular group of people, and to their particular

destination or place. Hardy and Robards (2015, p. 444) explain the critical potential neo-tribal theory provides:

> The neo-tribal lens offers a critical departure from traditional segmentation approaches, because rather than focusing on tangible aspects such as their common motivations, demographic characteristics, or travel behaviour once at their destination, it focuses on the intangible aspects, which create a sense of belonging among tourists.

This thesis builds on neo-tribal theory by establishing space as its fundament, and as the medium through which a particular group of people connect and are drawn together. Space becomes, in this sense, the answer to the questions I posed earlier; it brings sense to what surprised and bewildered me upon my reaching the resort, where I spent six weeks working as one of the resort employees and conducting an ethnographic study. It was the space of the resort that allowed gay visitors to connect to one another, and to feel a sense of kinship without having met before. By drawing upon neo-tribal theory, I seek to contribute to the understanding of tourism in the present day, across the globe, by focussing on the most microscopic of scales for tourism research: one single destination, a gay resort in the far north of Queensland, Australia. By elaborating on its specificity and its intimacy to its guests, who share little in common otherwise, I contribute an understanding of the nuanced and delicate production of traveller identities. Tourism studies are an incisive means of exploring the increasingly multifaceted politics of identity in our modern age. The choices of tourists reflect a fleeting leap from everyday realities into idealised and aspirational selves; these decisions embody a fantasy alternative to the self, and freedom from personal histories and narratives. It should be noted and emphasised that the intersection of tourism with the investigation of minority and marginal experiences is, as such, especially fruitful.

Research objective and aims

Neo-tribal theory has its roots in the discipline of sociology, though more recently it has been applied in marketing, tourism, and leisure studies. As outlined in the introduction of this prologue, tourism researchers have tended to focus upon commodities, as broad demographic and psychographic segmentation. Neo-tribalism, conversely, foregrounds the impulsive behaviours of individuals, who seek out others with shared interests, sensibilities and passions (Bennett 1999; Goulding & Shankar 2011; Hardy & Robards 2015). Neo-tribal theory steps beyond these traditional domains of demographic and psychographic segmentation. This approach recognises that travellers consciously engage in tourism as a means to escape the routines of everyday life; their departures from their homes and daily environments carry complex emotional, social, economic, and symbolic meanings. Moreover, the socialisation, communication, and kinship between members of these tribes is a crucial component of the theory; this is performed through different methods and media, and this shapes and informs the decision-making of tourists and deepens holiday experiences. As stated, this research builds on neo-tribal theory by establishing space as its fundament. The overall opportunity of this research is:

> ***To increase the explanatory power of the characteristic of space in the neo-tribal theory as it is applied to tourism.***

This will be realised by critically reviewing neo-tribal theory in the context of gay travel. This thesis highlights the importance of the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory, and as such affirms it as an essential and formative component of the theory. The ultimate aim of this research is to expand and enrich understandings of neo-tribal theory and to

comprehend the role of space, through a specific study of gay resort tourism. To guide this study, my thesis is built around the following research question:

1. What is the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form?

This main research question represents my primary area of enquiry, which is extended through two sub-questions, one thematic and one theoretical. These sub-questions will provide guidance in answering the principal question. They are:

1.1 What is the continuing significance of gay tourism?

1.2 To what extent can neo-tribalism exist independently to the underlying characteristic of space?

Significance of the research

This thesis embarks on an examination of the phenomena of neo-tribes, and its applications in the context of tourism. Thus, this study provides a number of theoretical and practical advancements. Neo-tribal theory has rarely been applied in tourism and leisure research (Hardy & Robards 2015). As such, this thesis provides a twofold contribution to the literature: it applies and extends neo-tribal theory, and tests its limits as a means of generating knowledge; and it creates new understanding of tourism, and particularly gay travellers, through this novel application of the theory. To be specific, this research enriches neo-tribalism by critically reviewing the spatial characteristic of the theory, and centring space within its applications. The thesis helps make the mutable boundaries of a neo-tribe more legible, by exploring whether these neo-tribal realities and affiliations can be perpetuated once a member leaves the tribal space behind.

The practical implications of this thesis are especially pertinent in the contemporary tourism context. As travel services become more customised, businesses become more specialised in catering to the individual needs of travellers, and barriers to tourism recede across the globe, it becomes ever more urgent to understand the particular motivations, needs, and values of travellers. Neo-tribal theory provides rich, sensitive and intimate access to the perspective of these culturally-entwined groups of travellers. Although members of a neo-tribe hail from different walks of life, they have demonstrated shared values and morals, and – relevant in this applied context – common loyalties to particular tourism products. This thesis reveals that understanding and investing in the distinguishing qualities of a destination or business is instrumental for building these neo-tribal loyalties, affiliations, and allegiances.

Lastly, this thesis contributes to the gay travel research by providing an updated critical review of gay tourism literature, and by enumerating areas for potential improvement.

Format of the thesis

I have published my research throughout my PhD candidature in order to contribute to the nascent critical dialogue about the application of the neo-tribal theory to the field of tourism studies. Preparing a PhD by publication resulted in more nuanced and reflexive research as I was continuously engaged in the process of reflection, peer review, and my continual conceptual refinement.

This PhD thesis is presented as a series of academic publications which are accompanied by two bridging chapters that provide a deeper exposition of methods and an extended

literature review of neo-tribal theory. Chapters 4 and 6 have already been published in peer-reviewed journals, Chapter 3 has been published in peer-reviewed conference proceedings, Chapter 8 has been accepted for publication in an edited book and Chapter 7 has been submitted for a review in a peer-reviewed journal. The extended abstract of Chapter 7 has appeared in the Critical Studies VI conference proceedings. It should be acknowledged that suggestions and feedback provided by the peer-reviewers played a unique role in the preparation of this PhD by publication. The publications forming this thesis proceed in the order they appeared in the aforementioned academic anthologies. In the course of editing these chapters into a manuscript, varying citation systems have been harmonised to the Harvard style modified by the University of Tasmania (University of Tasmania 2016), but the publication texts appear otherwise unchanged. This means that contextual information might recur between chapters, and some chapters cite one another. Moreover, as Chapters 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis have been published, or submitted for publication with peer-reviewed journals, minor stylistic nuances may occur, for example, the use of an active and collective writing voice. Unlike traditional theses, the reference lists remain at the conclusion of each chapter. In total, this thesis is comprised of nine chapters in four parts. The structure is outlined in Table 1 on page 16, excluding the prologue and epilogue.

Part 1 of this thesis consists of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. **Chapter 2** is a bridging chapter which introduces the theoretical background and specific rationale for this thesis. In the chapter, I relate the evolution of neo-tribal theory and its arrival in academic tourism literature. Through my discussion of various conceptualisations of neo-tribal theory in the context of tourism, I propose a lucid reinterpretation of the theory. I propose that neo-tribal theory can be distilled into four intertwined characteristics: fluidity in membership, shared

sentiment, rituals and symbols, and space. My analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of neo-tribalism reveals the lack of investigations into the spatial characteristic of the theory. I argue there exists a need for examination of the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. Following from this insight, I propose gay travel as a germane context for the expansion and enrichment of neo-tribal theory.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide a critical assessment of the extant literature on gay travel. This review reveals that the majority of such studies pertaining to gay travellers were conducted in the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, and tended to portray gay travellers as forming one homogenous market. I refute these perceptions by providing evidence that increased societal acceptance of queer sexualities, and furthermore technological advancement, have shifted and fragmented the way gay people spend their holidays.

Chapter 3 reviews the history of gay travel by drawing parallels with the historical progression of the LGBT liberation movement. By identifying two prevalent themes within gay travel literature, I elaborate upon and explore approaches that the gay tourism literature has taken. Importantly, the chapter contributes to the literature in three distinct ways. Firstly, it establishes that the literature has failed to keep pace with a changing societal environment, and therefore has stereotyped and generalised in its attempt to record the motivations and social behaviours of gay travellers, and has promulgated a distorted view of the gay travel market. Secondly, the chapter reveals that gay travel literature has focused to this point on demand-led elements of the market, whereas little research has been conducted into how the use and manipulation of gay space influences gay travellers. And, lastly, by drawing these conclusions I suggest that gay tourists are bonded by similar lifestyles and shared values. When applied here, the lens of neo-tribalism

offers an opportunity to perceive the complexities inherent to gay travel; to explore the way gay travellers communicate with each other before, during and after their journeys; and to observe the ways in which they use gay space and perform their identities.

In **Chapter 4**, I address the opportunity and need established by Chapter 3 for a novel exploration of the role and use of gay space. This chapter examines the significance of gay space for gay travellers, and the changing modes through which they access and use it. In this chapter I find that there exists a complimentary relationship between sexuality and space, though such spaces play different roles to different people, at different times and in different contexts. I argue that gay space has potential to not only be a place around which like-minded people coalesce, but that it also can be an agent for the transformation of how a particular space is viewed over time. Different audiences perceive particular spaces in disparate ways, and with divergent meanings, and this imbues space with dynamic and contestable value and foregrounds its cultural dimensions. Chapter 4's contributions to the literature are contained in two fundamental observations. It reasserts that the gay travel market is fractured and heterogeneous, and as such there is a need to revisit and reconsider the motivational and behavioural characteristics of the modern gay traveller as contained in the present literature. This chapter then asserts the need to explore a gay space in its spatial particularity – as selected, a gay resort – to understand the specific motivations of those that visit this space, and what needs those motivations embody.

Part 2 of this thesis follows, comprising Chapters 5 and 6. This section explores the methodological underpinnings that informed this research. In these chapters, I provide justification for why ethnographic methods were deemed appropriate for this research. The foundations introduced in these chapters indicate the overall writing style and process of

this thesis.

Chapter 5 presents a broad discussion of considerations and complications pertinent to my methodology, and provides a rationale for situating this research within the critical paradigm. The chapter provides an analysis of key ethical considerations, a descriptive overview of the research environment, and of the participants who participated in this research project.

In **Chapter 6**, I reflect critically upon my role as an 'insider', and question this role in the context of generating knowledge through my lived experiences. I argue that the position of an insider researcher is inherently more reflexive, perceptive and authentic, as participants feel permitted to express their morality and beliefs without implied societal judgement. By negotiating practices of reflexivity, I conclude that ethnographic methodology is capable of providing an in-depth understanding of the culture, practices and operation of a particular space – a gay resort. These methods generate wider insights into the issues which shape and inform the making of tourism knowledge. Fundamentally, I determine that ethnographic methods are a particularly apposite means of capturing ephemeral groupings – neo-tribes – with the sensitivity that endeavour demands. This chapter as such provides a glimpse of the research's results, and offers a transition from methods (Part 2) into findings (Part 3).

Part 3 consists of Chapters 7 and 8, and represents the findings and discussion section of this thesis. These chapters provide theoretical and practical contributions on several fronts. Firstly, the chapters contribute novel insights to the gay travel literature regarding the behaviour and motivations of those who elect to holiday at a gay resort. Secondly to this,

these two chapters form the theoretical crux of the thesis, as they establish the evidence for its advancement and enrichment of the theory of neo-tribalism.

In **Chapter 7,** I detail the findings of a research project in which I interviewed patrons visiting an exclusively gay resort in Far North Queensland, Australia. The interviews focused on their everyday experiences, behaviour, motivations in coming to the resort, as well as their engagement with other resort visitors and with the resort space itself. In particular, this chapter presents gay resort visitors as a neo-tribe, or tribes, and focuses upon their intimate engagement with the resort space. The chapter contributes evidence to the literature on neo-tribalism in that space is the focal point of tribal organisation, which enables the remaining three neo-tribal characteristics that I identified previously. Space not only mediates, but produces and governs the rituals and symbols, fluid membership, and shared sentiments which underlie neo-tribal experience; it is the connective force which makes these other characteristics legible and real.

Chapter 8 extends this spatial characteristic further. The interplay between fellowship and the particular qualities of the gay resort space is examined in depth through the application of the neo-tribal lens. In doing so, the chapter furthers the development of this theoretical framework. The chapter seeks to test the boundaries of a neo-tribe, to identify how they are legible and to whom, and to examine how stable these boundaries become. It explores the collective behaviour of gay resort patrons, and capitalises productively upon the enclosed resort space as an accessible microcosm of dynamic neo-tribal affiliations and gatherings. The findings strengthen the hypothesis that the resort space is itself the catalyst for neo-tribal coalescence. As space becomes the linking value, I argue that were this immediate shared environment removed, and these other characteristics decontextualized, the neo-

tribe would dissipate and cease to exist. This represents a major contribution to the characterisation and understandings neo-tribes in the literature.

In **Part 4**, **Chapter 9** represents the final part of the thesis, and as such it summarises the novel contributions of my research. It reviews and reiterates the opportunity neo-tribalism represents to the discipline of management, for growing engagement with tourism, and for generating customer loyalty and repeat patronage. These applications reemphasise space as the fundament of the synthesis of a neo-tribe. This chapter also discusses the limitations of my research. My reflections on the limitations of this project suggest opportunities for further research into neo-tribalism, gay resort tourism, and the benefits which might flow to academia and industry from those questions left unanswered.

Thesis structure

Table 1: Structure of the thesis

	CHAPTER TWO	CHAPTER THREE	CHAPTER FOUR	CHAPTER FIVE	CHAPTER SIX	CHAPTER SEVEN	CHAPTER EIGHT
PURPOSE OF CHAPTER	Literature review (Bridging chapter)	Literature review	Literature review	Methods (Bridging chapter)	Methods and findings	Findings and discussion	Findings and discussion
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	Reviews the development of the neo-tribal theory and identifies gaps.	Explores the history of gay travel and critically reviews gay travel literature.	Reviews the use of gay space in light of societal change.	Presents the rationale for the chosen methods.	Foregrounds why ethnography is the appropriate tool to study gay resorts.	Explores the role of space as a point of point of coherence around which neo-tribes form.	Explores the boundaries of a neo-tribe through the characteristic of space.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED	N/A	1.1	1.1	N/A	1	1	1.2
KEY OUTCOME	Four characteristics of the neo-tribal theory: fluidity in membership, rituals and symbols, shared sentiment, and space.	Gay travel market is not homogenous. The use of gay space has to be re-examined.	The role and significance of gay space has changed. A call to revisit the characteristics of a modern gay traveller.	Ethnography is the most suitable method to explore neo-tribal realities and to depict its sensible qualities.	Established opportunities of insider sociality for researching gay travel. Ethnography generates sensible insights into niche tourism activities.	The characteristic of space enables the remaining three characteristics. Space is the fulcrum for neo-tribal coalescence.	Space constitutes the tribal identity. Space is an essential characteristic for a neo-tribe to exist.

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PART

1

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER

2

Neo-tribalism

This is a bridging chapter.

> A 'Nietzchean 'return of the same', the obsession-creating idea of an author, the phrase typifying a musician, a painter's footprint, a thinker's endless theoretical digression or even singer's personal *ritornello*, emphasises the presence of timelessness in history and a sort of immobility in movement.
>
> (Maffesoli 2007)

Introduction

The purpose of this interconnecting chapter is to provide a foundation for the research outlined in this thesis. A PhD by publication presents particular challenges. In the interests of avoiding repetition in subsequent chapters, this section will only provide an overview of neo-tribalism, its applications, and my conceptualisation of neo-tribal characteristics. These will in turn be explored in closer detail through the chapters to follow.

This chapter introduces the roots of neo-tribal theory and its emergence in the field of sociology. It seeks to draw comparisons between the characteristics of the postmodern neo-tribe and the archaic tribe, in order to draw a useful analogy and contrast to relate neo-tribal theory. It explores further the first applications of the theory within the academic tourism and leisure literature, and the progressive development of these applications in this sphere. It then provides a detailed overview of the varying conceptualisations of neo-tribal characteristics in the literature, before introducing my proposed unifying conceptualisation of the theory. Drawing upon the seminal work of Maffesoli (1996), and the subsequent reinterpretations of the neo-tribal concept, it proposes the following four intertwined neo-tribal characteristics: fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, and space. Opportunities to further refine and develop neo-tribal theory based on this

framework, and to expand its applications in research, are then highlighted. This chapter uncovers an evident gap in the neo-tribal literature, pertaining to the characteristic of space.

Theorising neo-tribes

The theoretical framework of neo-tribalism appeared in the academic literature during the transition from modernity to postmodernity, through the work of Michel Maffesoli (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1999; Cooper, McLoughlin & Keating 2005; Cova & Cova 2002; e Silva & dos Santos 2012; Evans 1997). Maffesoli, a French professor of Sociology, coined the term and concept of neo-tribalism in his book *Les Temps des Tribus*[1]. To Maffesoli (1996), neo-tribes are 'heterogeneous fragments', which persist as a hangover from the era of mass consumption. These fragmentary associations of people are conceptualised as fluid 'neo-tribes' rather than strictly-bound subcultures, and this distinction forms the core of Maffesoli's theoretical invention. As these postmodern tribal groupings are innately ambiguous, small-scale, and 'affectual', they do not fit any of the traditional parameters of modern society (Cova & Cova 2002). Maffesoli's understandings of such parameters are best captured by Evans (1997, p. 229):

> Maffesoli's writings can be seen […] as a sociological concretisations and inscription of all those more abstract and rarified debates in postmodern theorising around the themes of 'language games', 'interpretive communities', 'networks', the return to the microsphere of the fragment and fractality.

[1] English: The Time of the Tribes. First published in 1988, in French.

The fragmentation, and hence, individualism of society has been accelerated as a consequence of developments within industry and commerce. It has been argued that the influences of post-industrial work, and the seemingly inexorable progress of deregulation, cultural admixture, and increasing trade collectively termed globalisation, has supplanted conventional sociality with 'radical individualism', which then engenders a 'ceaseless quest for personal distinctiveness and autonomy in lifestyle choices' (Arnould & Thompson 2005, p. 873). This assertion in turn echoes observations of anomie and moral disorientation during the transition from pre-industrial to industrial society, as most famously contained in Émile Durkheim's *De la division du travail social*.[2]

The neo-tribal concept was shaped into its present incarnation by a number of scholars – most notably by sociologist Andy Bennett (see Bennett 1999, 2002, 2005, 2011) – and in the late 1990s neo-tribal theory was consolidated as an alternative to the theory of subculture (Bennett 1999). This distinction was most evident in the field of youth cultural studies, as the concept of neo-tribalism exemplified the critical shift comprising 'post-subculture studies' (Hardy & Robards 2015).

The 2000s saw a series of critical debates as to the validity of the subcultural paradigm. Subculture was conceptualised as a relatively homogenous setting, within which individuals are held together in relatively stable, alternative-mainstream groups, such as goths or punks. These subcultures functioned as smaller and parallel models of the larger mono-cultural mainstream. Neo-tribalism, as it foregrounds fluidity, reflexivity, and individuality, then stands in stark juxtaposition with the culturally dominant, uniform, and class-based theory of subculture of the time (Bennett 1999, 2011; Robards & Bennett 2011).

[2] English: The Division of Labour in Society. First published in 1893, in French.

Of these new adherents of neo-tribalism, Bennett (1999) attempts to describe the grouping of young people under the terms of neo-tribalism, and as a reflection of postmodernity, but his work did not go without substantive criticism from scholars who endorse postmodern theories of subculture. Notably, Hesmondhalgh (2005) criticises Bennett for advancing a 'celebration of consumerism' and a voluntaristic conception of identity. Hesmondhalgh (2005) elaborates further, and draws attention to Bennett's inadequate regard for the structural issues which necessarily restrict any consumer choices through which people shape and perform their own identities. Bennett (1999, p. 607) conceptualised neo-tribalism as a 'freely chosen game', and in riposte, Hesmondhalgh (2005, p. 25) highlights the insensitivity of this 'game' to the limits and constrains underlying such choices: 'poverty, addiction, mental illness, social suffering, marginalisation, disempowerment, unequal access to education, childcare, healthcare, and so on.' Similarly, Blackman (2005, p. 12) claims that Bennett's arguments fail 'to give voice to different young people's experiences of marginality'. Bennett (2005, p. 256), in response, notes that consumer decision making in his neo-tribal framework includes cultural practices and transmission which do not necessitate disposable income, such as the spread of new musical styles or watching television, and that young consumers hold the agency to 'creatively [resist] the circumstances of their everyday lives'.

Through these debates, neo-tribal theory indeed emerged as an alternative model as to how social groupings form, fragment or dissolve, and communicate amongst themselves and between each other (Greenacre, Freeman & Donald 2013). Tribes are more than a residual category of social life. They exist, often unnoticed, alongside modern society in a manner both complex and intertwined (Cova & Cova 2002).

To compare neo-tribes and the tribes of antiquity is to draw a distinction between purely affective bonds – emotional affinity and cultural like-mindedness – and the kinship bonds of pre-modern tribes. Archaic tribalism is also associated with coercive conformity, under which rules and systems of enforcement and punishment are leveraged to ensure acquiescence to tribal norms; neo-tribes, due to their flexible and mutable nature, rarely hold a codified set of rules and norms in common, and so have a lessened need for coercive normativity. Cova and Cova (2012) extend this idea to posit that modern neo-tribes represent collective conquest that stands in opposition to institutional power. Neo-tribes are themselves distinct among the social groupings of modernity. Meir and Scott (2007, p. 334) suggest neo-tribes organise around 'locality, kinship, emotion and passion', as opposed to predominant and economic modes of social sorting such as occupational, educational, class, or ethic identities. The differences between neo-tribes and archaic tribes are presented in Table 1.

Table 2: Comparison of neo-tribes and archaic tribes. Adapted from Cova and Cova (2002) and Meir and Scott (2007).

Neo-tribes	Archaic tribes
Ephemeral and plural associations	Permanent and singular identity
A member can belong to multiple tribes	An individual is a member of one tribe only
Neo-tribal boundaries are fuzzy and conceptual	Tribal boundaries are physical
Members abound by shared sentiment, rituals and symbols	Members bond through kinship and dialect

Neo-tribes are known to be inherently ephemeral; they exist so long as there is enough drive *(puissance)* for the tribe to exist and perpetuate itself (Maffesoli 1996). The emergence and disintegration of these neo-tribal groupings depend on the strength of the

bonds between the members and their common interests. Even though the neo-tribes are heterogeneous in composition and membership (Cova & Cova 2002), they have this core homogeneous or unitary characteristic stemming from the focus on a shared passion. A neo-tribe must essentially be described as a network of heterogeneous individuals, with regard to age, income, sex, among other examples.

The tribe is not formed through commonality in any broader identity label; though nor could any incidental uniformity in identity among a tribe be excluded either, by definition. This is to say that individuals hailing from different walks of life become linked together through their shared passion and emotion, and this is what distinguishes the neo-tribe. For example, such passion or emotion might be represented through a membership to a certain gym, or support for yet another rising 'X-Factor' star. Neo-tribal traits are based upon a collective form of identity that stems from common sentiment, rather than any rational process or thought. E Silva and dos Santos (2012) define common sentiment (or shared passion) as the 'linking value' that glues the members of a particular neo-tribe together. The linking value of a commercial or cultural object is, in this sense, proportional in its power to connect the members of a nascent neo-tribe, and to cement their bonds. Members of a particular neo-tribe are themselves the arbiters of this linking value and relationship, and not the providers of products or services; neo-tribes may form around products never intended to promote such social affiliation, or conversely, goods with advertising infused with identity cues and markers may fail to build a tribe-like following (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1999).

Maffesoli describes neo-tribes as less defined by solidity, in the organisational forms which demarcate much of society, than they are a convergent display of lifestyles and associations which contain the tribal ambiance and state of mind (Robards & Bennett 2011).

Consequently, neo-tribes are not limited in the nature of their associations; they may be organised around transient and interim identities, lucrative commodities, labels, brands, or locations. The emergence of the – loosely-defined – neo-tribal form is an outcome of the collective conquest of a space; this might be, as one example, how a themed cruise ship functions as a temporary substrate for the manifestation of a new and particular neo-tribe (for parallels with cruise ship industry see Weaver 2011).

Neo-tribalism and tourism

Applications of the neo-tribal concept to tourism studies are rare. Explorations of specific consumer categories within tourism have often leaned upon class- or wealth-stratification, and have been rigid in their models. This entails the imposition of a rubric where tourist behaviour is atomised into its socio-economic, cultural, and supply-side determinants, but is ultimately regarded as a set of choices made by individual consumers within this larger system (Andriotis, Agiomirgianakis & Mihiotis 2008; Dolničar 2004; Prayag et al. 2015). The emergent cultures and decision-making of groups is not itself considered. The apparent consensus underpinning this epistemological stance is only now being undermined by the larger shift towards niche tourism, and the necessary reorientation this entails. Tourism research is challenged when the product is no longer a tourist and his or her enjoyment of the destination, in any stable and fixed sense. Under this new paradigm for research, the product becomes the social experience of a new environment as it is shared with like-minded others. It is then impossible to describe, let alone research, tourism behaviour in purely individual terms. To only sort tourism consumers by their demographic categories is to imagine these people as incapable of meaningful association, and of collective behaviour

and decision-making (Cova & Cova 2002; Hardy & Robards 2015). The core utility of neo-tribalism to tourism studies may be that it centres intangibles such as belonging, social interaction and association, mobility, and membership in the conversation. To conventional modes of tourism inquiry, these facets are regarded as wholly inaccessible, and are omitted from attempts to sort and categorise tourists. This omission might result in substantial failures in the effort to distinguish one type of consumer from another, and creates a set of assumptions – both underlying traditional research methods, and then in turn perpetuated by them – which are wholly insensitive to why some tourists choose to travel, to what end, and with whom.

Despite its rich qualities and clear applicability to tourism as a discipline, at the time of writing the neo-tribal approach had only been employed on three occasions in the context of academic tourism and leisure research. Table 2 illustrates the three focus areas of these research projects: a) clubbing culture in United Kingdom (Goulding & Shankar, 2011); b) recreational vehicle (RV) users in Australia and the United States (Hardy, Gretzel & Hanson 2013; Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel 2012); and c) guests on a cruise ship (Weaver, 2011). Further insight into neo-tribal applications in these projects is provided in Chapter 7.

Table 3: Applications of neo-tribalism in tourism literature

Focus	Authors
Clubbing culture	Goulding and Shankar (2011)
Recreational vehicle (RV) users	Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013), Hardy, Hanson and Gretzel (2012), Hardy & Robards (2015)
Cruise ships	Weaver (2011)

More recently, Hardy & Robards (2015) published a review of neo-tribal theory and its relevance to academic research in tourism. While the authors called for a return to Maffesoli's work, and for a re-examination of its power to illuminate travellers' symbolic and

behavioural characteristics, their publication did not note the need to review the prevailing conceptualisations of the characteristics of neo-tribes. It focused instead upon dividing the neo-tribe further, reducing it into myriad sub-tribes. The authors substantiated their proposition by focusing on past research placing RV users into the neo-tribal framework. Hardy and Robards (2015, p. 452) concluded there might be symbolic differences within the neo-tribe, which encompass motivations and desires alongside differing behavioural preferences, for rigs, amenities, and campsites. While the authors note that there might be various reasons underlying the choice of a particular campsite – space – there was no further inquiry as to the role of spaces in potential neo-tribal coalescence. The paragraphs to follow will investigate existing characterisations of neo-tribal theory, and propose a universal model for the characterisation of neo-tribal traits.

Towards a fuller conceptualisation of neo-tribes

There have been numerous attempts to conceptualise neo-tribal theory, and to distil the characteristics essential for neo-tribal existence. The roots of these conceptualisations do however all derive from Maffesoli's (1996) seminal work, in which he distinguished six key aspects of tribalism:

1. *The affectual nebula*. This aspect refers to the feeling and passion which, contrary to more conventional explanations, constitute the essential ingredients of all social aggregations. As such, Maffesoli explains that the experience of the other is the basis of community.

2. *Undirected being-together.* Per Maffesoli (1996), the undirected being together is a universal given of neo-tribes. This aspect ultimately represents the power of inertia, which helps neo-tribes to perpetuate and prevail in their existing states. Before any determination or qualification there exists this vital spontaneity, which guarantees a culture its own puissance and solidity. 'Puissance', or drive as it might be regarded, provides an inherent energy and vital force to all people, as opposed to hierarchical frameworks of institutional power.
3. *The religious model.* Maffesoli emphasises this analogy, and suggests it is the core characteristic supporting the theory. He explains figurative religiosity through shared symbols and rituals, which create mutual emotions and affinity.
4. *Elective sociality.* This aspect elaborates on the advantages and opportunities provided by free-form sociality in contemporary society, especially in great metropolises. His suggestion is that in the absence of larger, organising structures in society, people become inclined towards smaller group affiliations, and will seek in turn to deepen these ties as an organising principle in their own lives.
5. *The law of secrecy.* Secrecy provides a protective mechanism with respect to the outside world. Individual identities become subordinated and subsumed by the overarching 'affinity group', or in other words, the neo-tribal bond.
6. *Masses and lifestyles*. Maffesoli places neo-tribes as micro-associations within the larger relational network of society. They become a conduit for collective creativity and expression, and an essential means for people with disparate backgrounds and lifestyles to negotiate co-existence and forge affective bonds. Neo-tribalism gives meaning, locality, and sociality to the anonymised and economic organisation of society in large population hubs.

Following from the aspects described here, Arnould and Thompson (2005) position Maffesoli's neo-tribalism as part of consumer culture theory. The intersections are obvious: economic reorganisation prompted by the service workplace of post-industrial society, and inexorable globalisation, has driven intercultural exposure, cross-border integration, and limitless consumer choice, all of which combine to raise the social value of radical individualism, and ever more fragmentary identity constructions.

Further applications of the theory proceeded by organising social phenomena under the various characteristics of neo-tribalism. For example, Goulding and Shankar (2011) reviewed the theory through analysis of clubbing culture. The authors worked to determine whether clubbers might be viewed as members of a neo-tribe. The authors concluded that club attendees can indeed be regarded as members of a neo-tribe, as the activity of going out to a club involves individuals leaving behind the rules of everyday society. Such activity is necessarily limited in temporal duration; the individual must return to his or her day-to-day life and reality, and re-assume and conform to societal norms. The experience of clubbing may involve a sudden and novel set of social relations, which might entail role reversals, the mixing of social classes, and the formation of instant friendships, even if these reorientations and connections are themselves transitory. Furthermore, the experience may be marked by its intensity, especially involving pleasure and sensuousness. Following from this rationale, Goulding and Shankar (2011) asserted that neo-tribes are multiple and fluid, that they are playful, limited in their moral restraints, and that they are dynamic and ephemeral. The authors conceptualise neo-tribes as entrepreneurial, and state that they are bound by situated rules, codes and etiquette. Goulding and Shankar (2011) continue from

these observations by outlining five facets, which they find shape the theory of neo-tribalism:

1. *Neo-tribes are multiple and rarely dominate individuals' lives.* The existence of the neo-tribal group is fundamentally temporary, as it functions as a transitory escape from day-to-day routine. Besides the impermanence of this affiliation, a given individual is not compelled to be exclusively a member of one neo-tribe at any moment. This facet has synergies with the work of Bennett (1999), where he argues that neo-tribal theory stresses flows and interplay between different identities under different circumstances.
2. *Neo-tribes are playful.* This is tied to the plurality of membership: neo-tribal affiliation is often devoid of long-term responsibilities bearing moral heft. The relevance and value of neo-tribes lay in their diversity, as well as in their abundance of social links, and of inter-social and inter-cultural communication.
3. *Neo-tribes are transient.* Neo-tribes emerge, vanish, and re-emerge, as the confluence of people and resources in any environment shifts ceaselessly.
4. *Neo-tribes are entrepreneurial.* The description of neo-tribes as playful leads to the view that they have an empowered and emancipated attitude to the market. They consequently represent potential niches for new businesses to engage with and markets to build themselves upon. Neo-tribalism reifies the impulsive desire to seek out others with shared interests, sensibilities and passions, and it then has the power to influence the consumption of specific goods or services. Due to widening social networks and social media, neo-tribes have become more visible and tangible

to the market, and therefore there is greater impetus for the emergence of these associated niche market segments.

5. *Members of a neo-tribe have to learn the rules of engagement.* Despite these being ephemeral constructions, it remains necessary for a person new to a neo-tribe to learn its rules and etiquette to be considered a fully-fledged member. The authors suggest this facet is especially relevant to the tourism and leisure industries, as these remain the archetypal sites of experiential consumption.

Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013) proposed two major clusters of neo-tribal characteristics: the symbolic and the behavioural. The symbolic aspects encompass a sense of community, the sharing of a lifestyle, and the centrality of common social aspects which permeate members' lives. The behavioural element is conceptualised as a 'physical sharing of space' (Hardy & Robards 2015, p. 445). The authors note neo-tribes can be arranged around brands, labels and commercial goods. Similarly, Cooper, McLoughlin and Keating (2005) and Cova and Cova (2002) emphasise the importance of fellowship and a sense of belonging, which is manifested through shared passion, rituals, and consumption patterns, and the shared occupation of a particular physical or virtual space. As with neo-tribal collectives themselves, the symbolic core of their commitment is no stable construction, and itself varies through the life of the tribe; what is unitary is instead a mutual pride, and the coming together around the pursuit of a symbolic meaning shared in the moment (e Silva & dos Santos 2012). The diffuse construction of meaning and symbolism is held together by a shared sense of togetherness, and of common emotions, lifestyles, morals and beliefs, as well as tribal consumption practices and patterns.

Readings of these studies converge on a surprisingly consistent understanding of Maffesoli's theories and insights. These various interpretations and analyses approach his seminal work from the authors' respective disciplinary frameworks and foci, but their underlying applications of his principles remain broadly aligned. Drawing upon the aforementioned studies, and the seminal work by Maffesoli (1996), this research project proposes a model for the universal characteristics of neo-tribes. To illustrate the convergence evident above, the table following organises these studies using my model. It proposes that neo-tribes can be conceptualised as possessing the following four characteristics: a) fluidity in membership; b) rituals and symbols; c) shared sentiment; and d) space.

Table 4: Neo-tribalism in the literature, by characteristics.

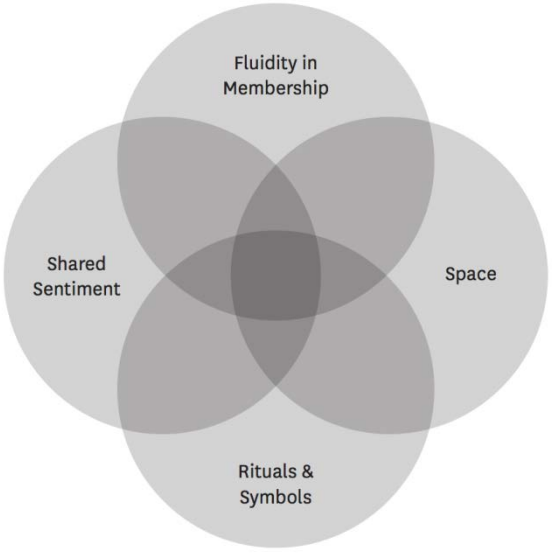
Neo-tribal characteristics	Authors
Fluidity in membership	Colosi (2010); Goulding and Shankar (2011); Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013); Hamilton and Hewer (2010); Hardy, Hanson and Gretzel (2012); Hughson (1999); Wang (2005); Weaver (2011).
Rituals and symbols	Bennett (1999); Cooper, McLoughlin and Keating (2005); Cova and Cova (2002); Goulding and Shankar (2011); Hamilton and Hewer (2010); Hardy, Hanson and Gretzel (2012); Hughson (1999); Wang (2005); Weaver (2011).
Shared sentiment	Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999); Bennett (1999); Colosi (2010); Cooper, McLoughlin and Keating (2005); Cova and Cova (2002); Goulding and Shankar (2011); Hamilton and Hewer (2010); Hardy, Hanson and Gretzel (2012); Hughson (1999); Robards and Bennett (2011); Wang (2005); Weaver (2011).
Space	Hughson (1999)

Understanding the four characteristics of neo-tribalism

Neo-tribalism is characterised generally by fluidity, occasional gatherings, and dispersal (Bennett 1999; Goulding & Shankar 2011; Hardy, Gretzel & Hanson 2013). As proposed in

the previous paragraph, neo-tribalism can be condensed into four overarching characteristics: shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, fluidity in membership, and space. Figure 1 depicts these characteristics, and the relationships between them.

Figure 1: Neo-tribal characteristics



Shared sentiment within neo-tribal theory represents an impulsive desire to seek out others with shared interests, sensibilities, and passions; this then has an impact on patterns of consumption (Cova & Cova 2002; Hardy & Robards 2015). Similar patterns of consumption can themselves act as means of connection between people, and the potential for consumer behaviour to express, strengthen and share identity has clear import from a marketing perspective (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1999; Cova & Cova 2002). This aspect has synergies with Turner's (1969) conceptualisation of 'communitas', whereby a sense of fellowship can subsume individual hierarchies of status. The overarching phenomenon demanding consideration is linkage between shared sentiment and its empowerment of individual members of a neo-tribe to gain strength, and a sense of identity, from their envelopment and connection within that group.

Neo-tribal groupings driven by the shared sentiment also possess unique rituals and symbols. Rituals and symbols pertain to the neo-tribe as they help it to shape, sustain, and understand the social bonds between the members (Maffesoli 1996). The need for such rituals and symbols is indeed heightened, and not diminished, by their ephemeral nature; the need to 'consolidate and affirm their union' leaves dynamic neo-tribes in a constant effort to develop or appropriate symbols and means of strengthening their unstable bonds (Arnould & Thompson 2005, p. 874).

Fluidity in membership is understood as the phenomenon of people's coming together from different walks of life for a shared purpose. The existence of the neo-tribal group is temporary and transitory, in that its removal from day-to-day routine is only enabled by its essential transience. Neo-tribal membership does not propose permanent and structural change. There is no compulsion to even maintain one exclusive tribal affiliation (Goulding & Shankar 2011). People may not only belong to multiple tribes, but they may also experience paradoxical conflicts within and between them (Cova & Cova 2002).

Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that the tribe, or at least part of its membership, experiences a need to occupy a defined space for its tribal gatherings. On another note, Hughson (1999) suggested that neo-tribes gravitate towards a central point of assembly. In this framework, spaces are used as sites of performance for the collective manifestation of identity. Spaces, for this purpose, can be physical (e.g. a football stadium, a concert hall) or virtual (e.g. internet forum, a smartphone app) (Robards & Bennett 2011).

The question of 'space'

It becomes evident while reviewing the literature of applications of neo-tribal theory (Table 3) that the characteristics of shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, and fluidity in membership have all been of interest to researchers in sociology, marketing, and tourism and leisure studies. It is also evident that the characteristic of space within the theory has been comparatively under-researched and underdeveloped. Space is simply taken as a given, without deeper inquiry into its instrumental role and the nature of its social construction.

Within the literature, space appears as something eternally between the lines; it exists as an omnipresent subtext, which is rarely considered directly. Hughson (1999, p. 14) observes that while Maffesoli (1996) regards the neo-tribal actor as a nomad, the theorist is no less concerned with 'the spaces occupied by people during their social wandering', as neo-tribes are indeed the product of such occupations of space. In the broader theoretical frame, space and place have become concepts frequently analysed as socio-cultural constructs as opposed to physical presences, connections or voids (Pritchard & Morgan 2000). Space has been theorised in a wide array of academic disciplines, perhaps most prominently geography, alongside the range of the social sciences (for example, see Amin 2002, 2004; Malpas 2012; Massey 1994, 2005; Pritchard & Morgan 2000; Valentine 2002). To borrow the words of Valentine (2002, p. 145), space is often considered 'something to be investigated, mapped and classified'. These various disciplines – the geographic and the social scientific – have seemingly converged on the socio-cultural and relational model of space (Malpas 2012). While space must clearly be considered as it is imbued with social, cultural and economic values, its geography and topography should not be considered ontologically immaterial or inconsequential (Malpas 2012). Valentine (2002, p. 146) argues that:

> Space is understood to play an active role in the constitution and reproduction of social identities and, vice versa, social identities, meanings and relations are recognised as producing material and symbolic or metaphorical spaces.

Neo-tribes will choose their 'points of gathering' where they might 'parade' their 'collective identities' based on their shared tribal traits and collective formations (Hughson 1999, p. 14). Such sites of performance are essential for neo-tribes to exist; spaces provide the ground for ideological and tribally-aligned cultural manifestation, without which sentiments and rituals cannot be expressed or manifested. A national park for RV'ers (Hardy, Gretzel & Hanson 2013), or a cruise ship for travellers (Weaver 2011), is readily understood as a stage for cultural manifestation, and these spaces have been interpreted as the 'anchoring places' that provide a momentary home or temple for a neo-tribe (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1999). These applications of neo-tribalism have entailed no further development of the spatial element of the theory however, other than what is contained in their plain admission that this characteristic exists.

The reinvention of space and place as socio-cultural constructions has led to claims that 'there is no such thing as a boundary' (Thrift 2006, p. 140), as place is in this sense endlessly relational and interconnected; claims that a dialectic of inside and outside must reproduce a conceptualisation of 'us' and 'them' (Massey 2005); and claims that the socio-cultural understanding of space is an imperative to abandon notions of delineations and distinctions entirely (Malpas 2012). Amin (2004, p. 33) contends that:

> Spatial boundaries are no longer necessarily or purposively territorial or scalar, since the social, economic, political and cultural inside and outside are constituted through the

> topologies of actor networks which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution.

Questions of boundaries in relation to space and neo-tribal theory are further discussed in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

While attention to socio-cultural interconnectedness and relationality is of course important, these discourses can transmute space into a purely figurative concept; it remains productive to consider how spatial delineations and organisations themselves can have social, economic and political consequences, and might productively catalyse and inspire alternative socialities. Spatial division or seclusion is a pre-condition of the conversion of a space into the territory or anchoring place of a neo-tribe, and the ephemeral realisation of the experience of the tribe. This thesis does not attempt to question or interrogate the ontological underpinnings of space, but it does regard space as meaningful in its own right, and not merely as a relational socio-cultural construct.

Ownership of space by a neo-tribe can entail an inversion of periphery and centre, even if transient and temporary. In this vein, and in the thematic purview of this thesis, it must be noted that this momentarily ownership is commercially-mediated as a tourism product. Britton (1991, p. 463) observes that:

> There may be a distinct hierarchy of holiday spaces in terms of […] the reconstitution and escape they are designed to provide, the social groups and classes which use them, the types of capital and attendant social and state relations associated with their construction and provision, and their physical characteristics and symbolism. […]. Leisure spaces have therefore become one element of the sociospatial division of labour in modern capitalist society.

Reference to a notion of neo-tribal ownership is not exclusively a figurative discourse, as neo-tribal occupation is commercially mediated; if tribes do not own their leisure-spaces-as-points-of-assembly, they certainly often rent them. The economic organisation of holiday spaces has been observed to directly relate to the formulation of the neo-tribe as a prevailing mode of contemporary socialisation (Cova & Cova 2002). Space is therefore transformed from an abstraction into a commodity in the experience of neo-tribes, and space is taken as such within the confines of this inquiry. Delineation, occupation and transient ownership of spaces permit neo-tribes to perform alternative socialities, and in turn, it is this space-identity interplay which empowers tourism providers to package and rent spaces and boundaries to neo-tribes-as-consumers. All these possibilities rest upon the inversion of periphery and centre for the neo-tribe.

The objective of this thesis is not to delve further into the ontology of space, but to rather extend the applications of neo-tribal theory by developing its spatial characteristic. To this end, it has been noted that the study of the tourism and leisure spaces of LGBT travellers is especially productive, as it permits the researcher to subject 'the 'taken-for-granted' to critical interrogation', and so promises wider relevance than LGBT cultures and communities alone (Markwell 1998, p. 21-22). To address the paucity of analysis of space as it underpins neo-tribal theory, and by leveraging the possibilities of LGBT space, subsequent chapters interrogate the set of neo-tribal characteristics and their interconnectedness and relations, and to elucidate the importance of space in the neo-tribal dynamic.

Conclusion

This bridging chapter relates the evolution of neo-tribal theory, and its arrival in the academic tourism and leisure literature. The discussion presented provides the breadth of conceptualisations of the theory, with particular concern for the area of tourism. My lucid reinterpretation of the theory was detailed through the introduction of four overarching characteristics defining neo-tribalism: a) fluidity in membership; b) rituals and symbols; c) shared sentiment; and d) space. The analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of neo-tribalism reveals the lack of inquiry into space as the characteristic enabling neo-tribal coalescence. This chapter then sought to provide a framework for how space will be explored in the chapters following. To interrogate space, a decision was made to focus on one space in all its particularity, delineations, and contours, and likewise to examine the neo-tribe which came to inhabit it. The specificity and removal of the resort this project examines facilitates this analysis, as does the status of gay travellers as a group possessed of shared cultural touchstones, and of the essential experience of minority-hood in wider society.

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CHAPTER

3

Rethinking gay tourism: A review of literature

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CHAPTER

4

The evolution of gay travel research

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Abstract

This paper explores literature relating to the gay travel market. It argues that the current discourse in this area has largely concentrated on the demand-led approaches such as the motivations and demographic profiles of gay travellers and the use of gay space. However, in light of societal change as well as the increasing role of technology, there is a need to revisit the demographic, motivational and behavioural characteristics of gay travellers, particularly in the context of their use of gay space. With this in mind, this paper highlights a number of significant opportunities for future research into the gay travel market.

Keywords: gay tourism; gay market; societal change; gay space.

Introduction

'I proudly announce I am gay…good luck all of you'[3]

(Rinkēvičs 2014)

The increased visibility and acceptance of gay men and women along with an increased demand for gay holidays has fostered a small body of academic and commercial market research into gay travellers. In this paper the concepts 'gay travel market' and 'gay tourism' are used interchangeably to describe a (niche) travel market that is primarily designed to cater to the consumer needs of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) people. This paper also uses a variety of terms such as LGBT, homosexual, queer, lesbian and gay travellers, as this reflects the diversity of terms found within the literature. Notably, most of the studies pertaining to the gay (travel) market were conducted in late 80s, 90s and early 2000s and were predominantly concerned with the level of earnings, expenditure and travel arrangements of gay travellers. At that time, epithets such as a 'dream market' or an 'untapped gold mine' were frequently used to describe the presumed lucrativeness of gay consumers (see Kahan & Mulryan 1995; Peñaloza 1996). The lack of a holistic view and an overemphasis of descriptive demographic data has resulted in some authors arguing that the gay travel literature tends to assume that the market is homogeneous and high yielding (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2014). Indeed, the overall interest in advancing the knowledge of the gay travel market remains limited (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Monterrubio 2009; Therkelsen et al. 2013; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2014). In comparison to other travel sectors, the gay travel market still remains under-researched, particularly in terms of its

[3] A 'come-out' message 'tweeted' on 7 November 2014 by the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs.

historical, social and psychological developments (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011).

Drawing upon the existing body of gay travel literature and the current societal, political and psychological environment for homosexuals, this paper argues that many journal articles regarding gay tourism are now out-dated, and consequently require a renewed academic assessment of this sector. In response to this, the paper revisits key themes that have dominated gay travel literature, firstly the demand-led approaches that seek to understand gay travellers including their demographic profiles and their travel motivations. Secondly, this paper reviews the research that has focussed on the significance and changing use of gay space for gay travellers.

Gay tourism

The nexus of societal change and gay tourism

This paper follows the sentiment expressed by the United Nations World Travel Organisation (UNWTO) Global Report on LGBT Tourism (2012) indicating that there is a distinct reciprocal relationship between gay tourism and societal and political advancements around the globe. Consequently, the evolution of gay tourism itself is strongly associated with the development and spread of homosexual rights. Although this paper will not address the origins and early developments of gay tourism, it should be understood that gay tourism is not a recent phenomenon: there is evidence that gay tourism existed in the eighteenth century when well-educated, upper-class homosexual men from Northern European countries took a Grand Tour to destinations such as the Mediterranean to search

for exotic cultures, warmer climates and the companionship of younger men (Clift & Wilkins 1995). However, due to the prevailing conservative discourses and hostility towards homosexuals, the gay travel market for decades and even centuries remained divided, peripheral and segregated from the heteronormative *Weltanschauung*. This situation slowly began to change during the mid-twentieth century. The Stonewall Riots in 1969 are widely considered to be a point of departure for a long but gradually improved process of liberation and acceptance of gay men and women (Clift, Luongo & Callister 2002; Coon 2012; Hughes 2006; Werum & Winders 2001). Several authors have argued that the resultant changes in the demographic composition of the population, shifts in cultural ideologies, increased educational levels and the establishment of gay non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and university queer societies have had an impact upon an improved perception of homosexuals (see Loftus 2001; Valocchi 2005; Werum & Winders 2001). This change was evident when in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental abnormality also known as a 'sociopathic personality disturbance', and also in 1990 when the World Health Organisation discarded homosexuality as a mental illness from the 'International Classification of Diseases' (King 2003).

Notably, the support of current popular culture, popular literature, the film industry and even sports associations, as well as the 'coming-out' stories of such well-known public figures as Tom Daley, Elton John, Ellen Page, Neil Patrick Harris, Ricky Martin, Ian Thorpe and others have contributed to the spread and development of homosexual rights. In addition, the political decisions of a number of countries to equalise the rights of heterosexuals and homosexuals and allow homosexuals to marry (or form partnerships) has legally eliminated the potential for marginalisation; as of 1st of January 2015, seventeen

countries and a large number of other territories had legally validated the integration of homosexuals, in the form of marriage equality. In May 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise gay marriage by popular vote after a landmark referendum with 62% in favour of the constitutional change on marriage equality (Referendum Returning Officer 2015). Furthermore, even more countries have demonstrated their support and solidarity by recognising same-sex civil unions or other forms of partnership. The impact of the societal change is also evident in countries such as in Estonia, which is the first post-Soviet country to pass a cohabitation agreement legalising same-sex partnerships (Riigikogu 2014) and Latvia, where the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs declared his sexual identity to audiences via Twitter (Rinkēvičs 2014). Furthermore, the changes in societal hegemony have also involved legal child adoption processes for same-sex couples implying that now there is an increased number of homosexual parents with children (Community Marketing Incorporated 2014; Prudential 2012).

Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy (2014) argue that the attitudes pertaining to gay men and women still substantially diverge depending on locality, culture, political decisions, history or religion etc. Similarly, Stuber (2002) claims that despite some improvements in the overall market in terms of acceptance and tolerance of homosexuals, societies still have to understand that substantial diversity exists and it should not be neglected. Yet surprisingly, while a gay travel market prior to and following the Stonewall Riots has documented the incontestable evidence that the attitudes towards gay men and women have changed over time, the body of academic literature pertaining to the gay (travel) market has failed to adapt to the altering reflections of the current realities in society. Specifically in the context of tourism, recent research has overlooked not only the fact of the societal change and legal

acceptance, but also the impact that this has had upon the potential formations and/or alterations of new gay travel motivations, experiences and destination choices. Indeed, Vandecasteele and Geuens (2009) have argued that a number of studies still reflect stereotyped and biased observations of the past.

Gay tourism: the Western versus non-Western world

Although, the last half a century witnessed tremendous developments in the matter of societal tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality in many countries in the Western world (e.g. Western Europe, Northern America, Australia), it is critical to acknowledge that a large number of African, Asian, Caribbean and Pacific countries do not recognise homosexuals and their right to freedom of expression. Furthermore, many countries oppress and persecute homosexuals. For example, homosexuality is punishable by imprisonment and/or heavy fines in over seventy countries and in more extreme cases by death in countries such as Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen (ILGA 2014). There is a common belief that homosexuality is a Western invention/perversion imposed upon their cultures. This sentiment is reflected by assertive chants such as 'there is no homosexuality in Africa' (Amory 1997, p. 5) or the notoriously famous Ahmadinejad's 'in Iran we don't have homosexuals' (Rahman 2014, p. 51). Consequently, the negative and ominous stance of certain countries (or rather country leaders) towards homosexuals has led to the perceptions of these countries being gay 'no-go' zones. This potentially explains the underlying reason why gay tourism in non-Western countries remains a rather unexplored theme.

A study on destination choice and risk avoidance conducted by Hughes (2002) has suggested that the perceived antagonism caused by either the law or by the disparate cultural norms has had an impact upon the travel geography of gay tourists. For example, homosexuals are less likely to visit such countries and/or geographical areas as China, Jamaica, Turkey, 'all Muslim countries', 'all Arab countries' and 'all African countries' (Hughes 2002, p. 306-307). Similarly, a recent Community Marketing Incorporated (2014) study has revealed that the gay community strongly prefers destinations that are discrimination-free and safe; only 11% of the respondents acknowledged that they would travel to a country that has laws against homosexuals in force (e.g. Russia, Jamaica, Kenya). Extant research, however, is limited by the lack of insight into travel motivations and behaviour of gay travellers going to or, especially, coming from non-Western countries that are hostile towards homosexuals. An emphasis within the small amount of existing literature on gay travellers going to non-Western countries has been upon the negative perceptions associated with such travel, including issues such as attitudes of host communities (e.g. Hughes, Monterrubio & Miller 2010), sex tourism (e.g. Hall 2007) and prostitution (e.g. Mendoza 2013). A more meticulous and comprehensive research on this dimension could contribute towards a broader understanding of gay tourism on a global scale.

In contrast to gay 'no-go' zones in non-Western countries, a large number of Western cities and countries are deliberately targeting the 'pink dollar'. Cities such as Amsterdam, Stockholm and Copenhagen actively promote gay and lesbian rights, and this is illustrated by the specific references to homosexual travellers within their respective tourism planning strategies (see Amsterdam Marketing 2015; Stockholm Visitors Board 2015; Wonderful Copenhagen 2015). Furthermore, events such as the Gay Games, the Sydney Mardi Gras and

the Eurovision Song Contest are well known gay tourism events, which are heavily promoted by their respective host cities. In addition to this, there has been a proliferation of support services for travellers in these countries. Tourism non-profits have been developed to support business and assist gay travellers, such as Gay and Lesbian Tourism Australia, and gay travel agents, such as Purple Roofs in the United States, and LGBT Travel in the United Kingdom are now prominent providers of gay tourism products and services.

Research approaches towards understanding the gay travel market

As gay and lesbian consumers have become a more visible group, there has been an ongoing debate regarding their existence as a target market. Some authors have argued that the gay market and, indeed, the gay travel market does not exist and that sexual orientation in itself should not constitute a market segment (Fugate 1993). Conversely, Gluckman and Reed (1997) and Peñaloza (1996) support the existence of the gay market segment on the grounds of the relationship between market segments and social movements. This belief that the gay market is a niche market prevails amongst marketers with an interest in the gay travel sector (Hughes 2005; Stuber 2002). Indeed the market has been described by some as growing rapidly, powerful, profitable and recession-proof (Clift & Forrest 1999; Guaracino 2007; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011; Peñaloza 1996; Pritchard et al. 1998). Of the studies which do recognise this market, the majority have concentrated on the demand-led aspects, such as the demographic characteristics of gay travellers, or their motivations. Conversely, the supply-led research has tended to focus on consumer behaviour such as the use of gay space and to a lesser extent, gay destination development (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2014).

Demographic explorations of the gay travel market

Demand-led approaches have commonly used demographic factors to describe the gay market. Gay travellers are often conceptualised as high spending travellers with significantly more disposable income than their heterosexual counterparts (Golding 2003; Hughes 2003). Recently, Community Marketing Incorporated (2014) estimated that LGBT travellers spend an estimated US$100 billion a year in the United States alone. Furthermore, homosexual travellers have been deemed to be well educated and as having less family-oriented issues to deal with in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts (Gluckman & Reed 1997; Golding 2003; Hughes 2003, 2005; Kahan & Mulryan 1995; Peñaloza 1996).

Badgett (1997) and Carpenter (2004) were amongst the first authors to question the homogenous demographic profile of a gay consumer. Their research challenged assumptions that homosexual men had more disposable income due to their status of being 'DINKs' (*i.e.* double income, no kids) and on the contrary, argued that many gay individuals often suffer from salary discrimination (Badgett 1997; Carpenter 2004).

Motivational and demand-led explorations of the gay travel market

In terms of the gay travel markets demand for experiences, a small cluster of gay tourism research has identified gay travellers as trendsetters (Gluckman & Reed 1997; Guaracino 2007; Hughes 2005), innovators (Vandecasteele & Geuens 2009), as well as 'early adopters', 'hedonists' and 'aesthetes' who demand non-commercialised tourism products (Hughes 2005; Stuber 2002). Homosexual holidaymakers have been described as *ex poste facto* revivers, as they were the first to return to tourism industry after the 9/11 events

(Guaracino 2007) and as such play an important role influencing innovation and change within tourism.

However, by far the majority of research into the gay travel market has focussed on gay traveller motivations. Clift and Forrest (1999) outlined three aspects that characterise the motivations of gay travellers: 'gay social life and sex', 'culture and sights' and 'comfort and relaxation'. Other studies conducted by various researchers also identified very similar aspects of gay travellers' motivations (see Clift & Wilkins 1995; Hughes 1997; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011; Mendoza 2013). Further studies have uncovered additional motivations such as the desire to engage in social interactions and self-exploration, self-fulfilment and the desire to get away from day-to-day routines (Hughes, 2006; Monterrubio, 2009; Pritchard *et al.*, 1998; Waitt & Markwell, 2006). It has been posited that gay men travel with an intention to express their sexuality, spend time with like-minded gay men, and/or simply to be in a safe, bully-free environment (Clift & Wilkins 1995; Hughes 2006; Monterrubio 2009; Pritchard et al. 1998; Waitt & Markwell 2006). Moreover, it has also been suggested that new and unfamiliar destinations provide closeted gay men the opportunity for freedom from the constraints of society. Such destinations offer them potential anonymity, as they have a chance to temporarily 'come out' and be open about their sexual preferences (Graham 2002; Holcomb & Luongo 1996; Waitt & Markwell 2006).

Commonly, gay travel literature suggests that the opportunity to have sexual encounters is one of the most significant reasons why homosexual men are motivated to travel (Clift & Forrest 1999; Hughes 1997, 2006; Mendoza 2013; Monterrubio 2009; Pritchard et al. 2000; Waitt & Markwell 2006). The importance of sexual encounters as a key motivation for travel

may not only be a phenomenon which is relevant exclusively to gay travellers. A study conducted by Clift and Forrest (1999) revealed that sex indeed played an important role for gay men while being on holiday, which was similar to the early suggestion by Plummer (1992) that the travelling behaviour and interests of modern young gay men are equivalent to those of heterosexual men and women. These propositions are supported by several studies that have explored the role of the sexual experience as a significant motivational factor amongst heterosexual Canadian women engaging in holiday romances with the local beach gentlemen in the Caribbean (Herold, Garcia & DeMoya 2001), or British premarital stags plunging into the abyss of cheap 'booze' and flirting with the local women in Krakow, Poland (Thurnell-Read 2012). Unlike the sex tourism literature which commonly explores issues related to the impacts of sex tourism upon local sex workers and destination image (see Herold, Garcia & DeMoya 2001; McKercher & Bauer 2003; Nuttavuthisit 2007), gay sex tourism is deficient in this regard. However, a small body of gay tourism, as opposed to gay sex tourism, literature focuses on supply side issues such the impacts of gay tourism upon local communities (Hughes, Monterrubio & Miller 2010).

Consequently, it appears that gay travel motivations usually arise from the opportunity to feel free and a possibility to articulate 'gayness' in a non-judgmental space. Drawing upon this argument, motivations that are driven by the need of freedom and a sense of belonging to a particular community provides grounds for the emergence and operations of queered, especially gay male, spaces in popular gay travel destinations. The term 'queered' itself is a highly complex and political term (Johnston 2005); however in this context it defines the metamorphosis of a particular space: it is a space where heterosexuals are effectively outnumbered by homosexuals and it is adapted to primarily cater to gay consumer needs. It

should be noted that the majority of research relating to gay travel motivations has been conducted in predominantly gay locations, where gay travellers are likely to have a 'gay holiday' (see Blichfeldt, Chor & Ballegaard Milan 2011; Clift & Forrest 1999; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011). These studies have excluded the motivations of homosexuals who are partially or not at all interested in 'gay holidays' (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013). For example, the assumed relationship between 'sex' and 'gay holiday' is not equally appealing to every gay traveller (Blichfeldt, Chor & Ballegaard Milan 2011; Therkelsen et al. 2013). A few studies have confirmed that lesbians are less likely to seek sexual experiences while on holiday (Pritchard et al. 2000; Therkelsen et al. 2013). Additionally, the motivations implied within the existing body of literature pertaining to sexual motivations for gay travel are likely to be less reflective of the travel motivations of gay families. In fact, a study in the United States has revealed that LGBT parents are more likely to choose a family-friendly destination (65%) and a hotel (63%) than staying at an LGBT-friendly property or destination (Community Marketing Incorporated 2014).

In a similar vein, current trends within the tourism literature are calling for the 'de-exoticisation' and 're-socialisation' of tourism research, where the relationships of family and friends are placed at its core (Davidson 1996; Larsen 2008; Schänzel & Smith 2014; Smith & Hughes 1999). Following the notion voiced by Davidson (1996) it is understood that the critical importance of sociality and social relations to everyday life also translates to the realm of tourism studies where the relationships amongst holidaymakers are paramount, and yet remain largely ignored within tourism literature (Larsen 2008). Schänzel and Smith (2014) have argued that quantitative approaches to tourism studies have predominated mainstream travel literature, drawing upon the individual interpretations to then define

group behaviour. Whilst these studies are suitable for capturing the phenomena at a broader perspective, it fails to adequately delve into the complexity and diversity of particular subgroups that are known to exist. Evidently, such accounts are unsuitable to characterise a collective experience of, for example, gay families, and groups of friends or same-sex partners travelling together.

In terms of motivation, it is also notable that there is tendency within gay travel research to focus only on gay men (for example Clift & Forrest 1999; Clift & Wilkins 1995; Hughes 2005; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011), whereas the roles of lesbian, bisexual or transgender travellers have been either (un)intentionally ignored or less extensively investigated. Pritchard et al. (2000) and Therkelsen et al. (2013) explain that it is very difficult to establish precisely what lesbian tourism is as it lacks some of the inherent gay tourism qualities, including the aforementioned emphasis on sexual experiences. Taking that into consideration there is an underpinning assumption that 'a lesbian holiday would be very different from a homosexual holiday' (Pritchard et al. 2000, p. 275). Consequently, an overarching possibility that requires exploration in future studies is that the motivations of a modern gay traveller may have substantially changed as a result of an increased acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships. This is especially pertinent as much of the early demographic and motivational research was conducted prior to social and institutional reform in relation to this sector.

The role of gay space in travel

Overwhelmingly, supply-led approaches towards research into the gay travel market have focused on gay space. In the context of everyday life, heterosexuality is the prevailing sexual orientation; therefore most of the private, public and virtual spaces are *per se* heteronormative and even heterosexually masculine (Haslop, Hill & Schmidt 1998; Hughes 2003; Pritchard et al. 1998; Provencher 2007). Consequently, the concentration and preponderance of heteronormative spaces have potentially resulted in stigmatisation, marginalisation and oppression of homosexuals and their freedom of expression. The occurrence of such a situation has required an exigent call for the creation of 'queered' – non-heterosexual-dominant – spaces, where homosexual identity could be expressed freely and without prejudice (Haslop, Hill & Schmidt 1998). Ultimately, gay space represents a 'physical manifestation of gay community' (Hindle 1994, p. 11) and offers homosexuals a cultural and social platform that is not bounded by heterosexual norms. The existence of such a space is essential, as it provides a point of coherence where like-minded people possess a feeling of fellowship and share common interests, as well as have a sense of belonging and solidarity amongst themselves. These spaces also serve as a platform for communication and execution of various services and sales, for example, dating, escort, HIV testing, counselling, cinemas, pubs, cafés, hotels, gyms and dance clubs. From a radical geography perspective it has been argued that 'fluidity and inconsistency in the social boundaries of sexuality are made and remade through […] practices and experiences' (Waitt, Markwell & Gorman-Murray 2008, p. 796), implying that there is the potential for transformation and change including freedom, self-recognition and the opportunity for creating new identities and practices. Gay space is closely interlinked with 'gay lifestyle' that

creates a particular pattern of consumption and needs, including travelling (Hughes 2003; Hughes & Deutsch 2010). On the other hand, 'spaces […] can take on quite disparate meanings for different people and for diverse social situations' (Endelman 1995, p. 74), hence the imposed over-righteousness of gay space for some homosexual travellers might lead to the negative stereotypes that imply an inherent association with an easily-identified and clichéd group of people.

Scholars exploring the phenomenon of gay tourism have noted that there is a complementary relationship between sexuality and space (see Binnie & Valentine 1999; Hughes 2003; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011; Waitt & Markwell 2006). Tourism, on the other hand, is an intangible economic activity where the core product is time in a space that is distant from the normative location. Arguably, modern gay tourism constitutes 'a particularly concentrated spatial pattern' (Holcomb & Luongo, 1996 p. 712) and provides gay men and women with a strong feeling of togetherness and sense of community, where they feel safe from discrimination, bullying and animosity. Gay spaces within the context of tourism pertain to places that are adopted and used primarily by homosexuals and are situated outside their regular locale. However, gay space *per se* does not act as an immediate 'destination attribute' that solely impacts the process of holiday decision making; arguably, 'gay space qualifies as a leisure space that may play different roles to different gay people at different times and in different situations' (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013, p. 473). On the contrary, some of the past studies provide different insights and claim that the so-called 'gay space' component is one of the most common essentials requested by travelling gay men (Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Melián-

González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011; Monterrubio 2009; Pritchard et al. 1998; Pritchard et al. 2000).

In the literature, the term 'gay space' often signifies a physical gay travel location that is commonly situated in an urban agglomeration such as Paris, Sydney or San Francisco or at a sun-and-beach destination such as Far North Queensland, Key West or the Greek islands (see Browne & Bakshi 2011; Hindle 1994; Holcomb & Luongo 1996; Hughes 2003; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Provencher 2007). At some destinations, where homosexuality is not fully accepted, gay travellers are still expected to express their sexuality only in fixed, limited and specifically set queered places, such as bars, cafés, clubs, saunas, gay-exclusive accommodation and beaches (Bristow 1989; Hughes 2003; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Provencher 2007; Waitt & Markwell 2006). Traditionally, these physical gay locations, that are also the attributes of gay destinations, formed the understanding of what constituted a typical 'gay holiday'. Hughes and Deutsch (2010) explained that the 'gay holiday' at its core denotes one's being in a spatial concentration of various gay spaces, socialising with predominantly or exclusively other homosexuals and expressing 'gayness' without paying much attention to other kinds of qualities, facilities and attractions. However, drawing upon Hindle's (1994) idea that the homosexual community is a concept and is often not tied to a physical location, it could be argued that gay space as a concept is also more fluid and could exist in other forms and designs. The relevance of this argument today is crucial as tourism researchers are only starting to understand the impact of social media and technology on the habits of travellers. The emergence of such technology-based gay platforms as Grindr, Scruff or Tinder has changed the way gay men interact. Gay men are no longer required to be in a physical gay space such as a gay bar or a gay resort to seek the companionship of

other gay men. This tendency is commonly observed amongst the younger gay men who potentially do not empathise with a physical gay space the same way their older counterparts do (Visser 2014). Ineluctably, drawing upon the idea that gay spaces could exist in forms other than physical, these new online platforms have a capacity to create temporary 'gay holiday' experiences wherever the internet is available. Additionally, the use of such platforms could extend particular gay experiences while being on a typical 'gay holiday'.

Arguably, the emergence of a tech-savvy, or rather 'app-savvy', gay generation coupled with a growing acceptance of homosexuals has resulted in the 'degaying' process of gay spaces. An increased concentration of heterosexual consumers in traditional gay spaces, such as bars, clubs and gay districts, and the integration of gay consumers into heterosexual spaces has fused previously strongly dichotomised understandings of homosexual/heterosexual spatiality (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2014). Ironically, while an elevated heterosexual interest in gay spaces might be interpreted as positive in terms of the prevailing societal change, for many authors the growing popularity of gay areas and leisure spaces amongst heterosexuals has been seen as an unfair, problematic and detrimental issue (Browne & Bakshi 2011; Haslop, Hill & Schmidt 1998; Hughes 2003; Pritchard et al. 1998; Visser 2008, 2014). For instance, Visser (2014) has raised a concern that gay men are 'absorbed' into a heterosexual *Lebenswelt* and the traditional gay spaces have been assimilated and 'infiltrated' into the heterosexual sphere of influence (Browne & Bakshi 2011). Consequently, some of the authors have appealed to reclaim the ownership and reinstate the functions and facilities of the former gay venues (Hughes 2003; Visser 2014). These claims reflect some of the opinions that highlight the importance and symbolism of a physical gay space;

yet simultaneously they conceivably fail to sustain and understand the changing significance of these spaces to the diverse gay market.

The overarching idea that needs to be considered is that the *status quo* of symbolic and physical gay space, along with the mental representations mediating attachment behaviour in regard to the traditional gay space, has been impacted not only by the emerging new forms of technology but also by the perpetual change in society. Furthermore, gay space, both physical and virtual, has a potential not only to be a place around which like-minded people coalesce but it also has a capacity to be an agent for the transformation of how a particular space is viewed over a period of time as different audiences could perceive a particular space in disparate ways and meanings. These aspects have potentially changed the way gay travellers may, or may not, engage with gay space while on holiday.

Discussion

This paper aimed to revisit the existing body of literature pertaining to the gay travel market as well as indicate the gaps that have potentially occurred in light of an increased visibility and acceptance of homosexuals and ineluctable changes in society. In spite of an elevated interest in gay travel research, much of the published literature is arguably dated, as it was published in the 1990s and early 2000s, when views towards homosexuals even in Western countries were not as positive as they are today. In particular, a large amount of research was conducted following a decade of fear fuelled by the AIDS epidemic and prior to an era of societal change where gay marriage, lifestyles and families have been accepted both legally and morally in many countries.

When reviewing the existing literature, it becomes apparent that much of the research has focussed on the demographic, behavioural and motivational explorations of wealthier middle-class white gay men without children living in urban areas (see Clift & Forrest 1999; Clift & Wilkins 1995; Hughes 2003; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011; Visser 2003, 2014); whereas the motivations and the role of, for example, gay families and transgender or lesbian travellers have been overlooked. Additionally, early literature suggested that the gay travel market is homogenous and was made up of well-educated, high spending travellers who sought to express their sexual identity in a safe environment, but also that the possibility to have sex while on holiday was one of the most significant motivators to travel. This paper argued that the significance of a sex factor while on vacations has been potentially over-exaggerated as the presumed relationship between 'sex' and 'gay holiday' is not always equally appealing (i.e. lesbian travellers) or suitable (i.e. gay families) to every gay traveller. Furthermore, it could be argued that the majority of the studies into the gay travel market are rather opportunistic in their nature as they have discounted the motivations of the gay travellers who do not wish to identify with the concept of 'gay holiday' or do not see homosexuality as a primary defining factor of his/her personality.

Inevitably, stereotyped and generalised projections on the motivations and social behaviours of gay travellers have perpetrated a distorted understanding of the gay travel market, as well as the needs and desires of a gay traveller (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2014). The concentration of these projections may have resulted in the typification of what seemed to be a 'standard' gay traveller. Consequently, the 'standard' or 'typical' gay traveller has become the object of the majority of gay leisure and travel research. In other

words, literature itself has unintentionally homogenised the gay travel market. Although some later studies have questioned the integrity of a 'typical' gay consumer profile and the implications were made to emphasise the heterogeneity of the gay travel market (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Therkelsen et al. 2013), there has been a lack of deeper interest in researching the diversity that might exist amongst the sub-niches of the gay travel market. Diversity within the gay travel market could be observed in terms of age (*e.g.* young and old), gender (*e.g*. man and woman) and/or place of living (*e.g.* rural and urban) etc. (Branchik 2002). Inclusion of a broader spectrum of demographic characteristics as well as concentration on particular holiday experiences, destination choices and interim holiday identities could also help to diversify current knowledge of the gay travel market and the consumers affected. Moreover, it could be a potential call for further research into particular sub-niches of homosexual men and women travellers.

It would be also logical to suggest that societal changes such as increased tolerance and acceptance of homosexuals in many countries, coupled with legislative changes to support their lifestyle, may have impacted not only upon the motivations and travel habits of gay travellers, but also the way homosexuals engage with the physical and, for some, symbolic 'gay space' while on holiday. This paper has determined that 'gay space' might be more fluid in its design and exist in virtual forms. The emergence of technology and, in particular, gay dating 'apps' has changed the way gay men connect and communicate, hence the symbolic value and the need for a physical gay space has potentially decreased. Arguably, the growing significance of gay 'apps' coupled with the increased acceptance of homosexuals has culminated in the 'degaying' process of physical gay spaces. From the supply-led perspectives and in light of societal change and law reform, Visser (2014) argued that, in

particular, younger gay men might be becoming less inclined to spend their time in the designated traditional physical gay spaces. It may follow that an increased social acceptance has altered the ways gay travel motivations are constructed and consequently the concepts of ‘gay space’ and ‘gay holiday’ may be contested. As a result, following the current trends within the diverse gay travel market, it becomes apparent that there is not only a room for a greater academic debate but also a need for marketers to revisit and (re)adapt to the demographic, motivational and behavioural characteristics of a modern gay traveller.

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PART

2

METHODS

CHAPTER

5

Methodological framework

This is a bridging chapter.

Introduction

This research aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the function of space in neo-tribalism, especially as the point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. The overall opportunity of the research was to increase the explanatory power of the characteristic of space as it is applies to tourism. While social groupings are readily described in academia in the vernacular of culture, ethnicity, family, or nation, neo-tribal theory has emerged to address a more ephemeral and intangible affiliation: single shared interests. This necessitates a model for interpersonal affiliations which is plural and dynamic, as members of any one such grouping may hold numerous other interests which may overlap or, evidently, may not. Indeed, Greenacre, Freeman and Donald (2013) define neo-tribalism as an alternative conception of how social groupings emerge and communicate. Gay tourism, with its innate inversion of periphery and centre for LGBT people, presents the ideal environment to refine and extend the theories and applications of neo-tribalism.

To leverage this opportunity, this research explored and focused upon a particular LGBT destination – the only gay and lesbian resort in Australia. Particular attention was given to the social interactions between the resort's patrons, their behaviour, and their interplay with the resort space. This research further explores whether the resort prompted visitors to behave in ways different to their usual day-to-day routines, and whether they developed a bond with the resort, displaying particular qualities. Close concern for the role of time in the formation of interpersonal relationships at the resort demanded a considered methodological approach. Of note in this respect is the simple truth that respondents themselves may not be aware of the fine differences, and the gradations in time, that is of essential concern to this research. A flexible, qualitative approach helps to prompt reflection

on the part of participants, and encourages depth of interaction between participant and researcher. These methods remain open to the unanticipated and unexpected, in a way a quantitative rubric may not (Gordon 1999).

This chapter provides a bridge between the literature review and the detailed description of my insider approach contained in Chapter 6 – 'The Shared Oasis: An Insider Ethnographic Account of a Gay Resort'. Specifically, the chapter outlines the specific research design and the methodological framework that underpins this research. The first section of this chapter reviews its ontological, epistemological and theoretical approaches. The second part of this chapter conveys the merits and complications of my critical approach to this research. The third section explores the appropriateness of a qualitative framework to these ends, and the fourth part outlines the research design. The fifth part of this chapter introduces the rationale for ethnography as the epistemological lens through which data collection and analysis was conducted. This section describes in detail the research methods employed for this project, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, and participant observation methods. The sixth section situates the research within its wider context and provides a brief overview of the fieldwork, and the seventh and final section of this chapter provides detail about the participant recruitment process and a brief overview of the participants. The chapter concludes with reflections on the unique ethical complications I faced conducting this research.

Research paradigm: ontology, epistemology and methodology

This research required a paradigm for accessing and recording gay travellers' perceptions of their own uses of space while on holiday. Specific ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies delineate and define the qualitative research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). Understandings of ontology relate to the substance and the nature of existence and reality. Within the social sciences, ontology prompts questions regarding the essence of existence, such as: *What is the nature of reality?* and *What is the nature of the world?* (Guba 1990). Epistemology is, conversely, the interrogation of the nature of knowledge, and it must ponder what 'is the nature of the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the known (or knowable)' (Guba 1990, p. 18). Following from these first principles, epistemology asks: *How is it possible to know?* and *What is it possible to know?* (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Guba 1990; Guba & Lincoln 1989). Guba (1990) explains methodology as the approach of the inquirer to knowledge. Methodology rests upon these aforementioned philosophical and then theoretical presumptions, which govern how knowledge is generated and so how research should be conducted (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). 'Methods' by contrast denote the various processes and techniques through which data is gathered and analysed (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). Many authors blur the terms 'research method' and 'research methodology', and hence make the false suggestion these concepts are fungible – that methods and methodology are the same (King 1994; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). The term 'methods' refers to the techniques and procedures used to gather and analyse evidence, while 'methodology' extends to and encompasses the philosophy underlying these methods; that is, the nature of its claims to knowledge, and perhaps truth, and the implications of these systems to the selection of methods as tools fulfilling these

ends and as appropriate to the study being undertaken (Cook & Fonow 1986; King 1994; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). The following aspects of the research process are considered to be part of this study's methodology: its research paradigm; the method of inquiry; the methodological approach; and its specific methods.

Neuman (2003) outlines three paradigms for research in the social sciences: the positivist, the constructivist or interpretive, and the critical. Each paradigm varies in its ontology, epistemology and methodology; emergent from this is the necessity that these are different understandings on how existence and knowledge are viewed and measured, and these approaches need not be compatible. The following three paragraphs present each of these paradigms, establishing their central differences in perception, measurement, and observation of the world. A supplementary comparison of the ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies of the positivist, the constructivist or interpretive, and the critical paradigms is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 6: A comparison of the ontology, epistemology and methodology of positivist, constructivist/interpretive and critical paradigms. Adapted from Creswell (2007), Guba (1990), Lincoln and Guba (2000), and Neuman (2003).

	Paradigms		
	Positivist	**Constructivist**	**Critical**
Ontology	Realism, also referred to as 'naïve realism' (Lincoln & Guba 2000). Reality exists and is not bounded by time and context, and it is therefore generalisable.	Relativism. There are several realities that exist in distinct contexts. Realities are constructed in the minds of people through socially-situated experiences, and these realities can be local and specific.	Relativism/historical realism. Unitary reality exists, though it cannot be comprehended thoroughly. Reality is perceived through historically emergent social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender principles.
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist. Scientific knowledge is the only possible form of knowledge and therefore its results are true. The relationship between researcher and	Transactional/subjectivist. Knowledge is constructed: researcher and participant are interactively linked, and therefore claims to truth are contingent, mediated,	Transactional/subjectivist. As researcher and participant are interactively interlinked, the participant becomes influenced by the values of the researcher, and vice versa.

	subject is distal and non-interactive; therefore the biases and values of the researcher do not affect the results.	and in some sense created. Similar to critical theory, the border between ontology and epistemology is often blurred.	Consequently, findings are value-based.
Methodology	Experimental/manipulative. Primarily applied in quantitative research. Questions and/or hypotheses are posed beforehand, and those are later verified by empirical tests and predetermined conditions.	Hermeneutic/dialectic. The hermeneutic facet endeavours to precisely narrate individual constructions, which are created through the interaction between researcher and participant. The dialectic facet interprets, contrasts, and compares these multiple constructions with each other, in order to generate one or more constructions with which there is concurrence.	Hermeneutic/dialogic/dialectic. Research enquiry necessitates a dialogic relationship between researcher and participant, and this dialogue should be dialectic. This dialogic facet strives for the elimination of false consciousness, and facilitates transformation.
	Experimental empiricism.	Interpretive ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative research.	Dialogic: a mix of nomothetic and ideographic approaches, ethnography, grounded theory, queer theory, feminism, critical race theory.
	Approaches		

According to Myers (2013), positivism is considered the leading paradigm in most fields of management and business inquiry. Many researchers go so far as to disregard alternative paradigms, and propound the equivalence of positivism with science (Neuman 2003). Positivist social science adopts a realist ontology, which proposes that reality exists and is not bound by time and context and is generalisable (Guba 1990). Once realist ontology is adopted, the positivist paradigm links this with objectivist epistemology. The latter suggests that scientific knowledge is the only form of knowledge possible, and therefore the results obtained from these methods represent truth (Guba 1990). To put this in different terms, objectivism assumes that people share the same understanding of reality and the same knowledge of its nature, and that this universal experience can be described in objective terms. Moreover, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is distal and

non-interactive, and therefore biases and values of the researcher are immaterial and do not affect the results (Guba 1990; Lincoln & Guba 2000). By separating the researcher from the participant, positivists claim access an objective reality that can be juxtaposed with their initial hypothesis, thus facilitating discovery of the truth through objective tests of these claims to truth. It can be readily argued that the impetus of positivist methodology is to build hypotheses upon these deductive axioms, postulations which can be tested afterwards; the consequence of this process of proof or falsification is to produce nomothetic accounts of reality (Bryman & Bell 2007; Neuman 2003). The positivist paradigm additionally enables the framework of inductivism, by deriving knowledge from data, which is then reinterpreted as fixed and external natural or social laws (Bryman & Bell 2007). Guba (1990) proposes empirical experimentalism as the methodology which underpins positivist research.

The second paradigm highlighted by Neuman (2003) can be broadly described as interpretive social science. While there exists some disagreement as to definitions in the literature, this paradigm has been suggested as being synonymous with constructivist, naturalistic, and hermeneutic paradigms (Guba & Lincoln 1989). By adopting a relativist ontology, constructivists contend that a myriad of realities exist, which are constructed in people's minds from their socially-situated experiences; these realities can be local and specific, as opposed to universal (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Guba & Lincoln 1989). The nature of these multiple realities varies and they are based upon numerous factors, including social, economic, political, situational, and experiential/personal experiences (Guba & Lincoln 1989). Along with the widespread belief that social constructivists do not perceive knowledge as 'disinterested, apolitical, and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of

human experience', it has been argued that knowledge itself is in some sense necessarily 'ideological, political, and permeated with values' (Schwandt 2000, p. 198).

Critical theory emerged in an opposition to positivist social science. The approach of critical theorists can be seen as 'ideologically oriented inquiry' (Guba 1990, p. 23), which arises from the need for human empowerment, personal liberation, and social change (Creswell 2007; Fook 2003). As critical theory stands hand-in-hand with continuous social critique vis-à-vis class, gender, and race-based constraint, critical realists determine reality through historically-emergent social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gendered principles (Creswell 2007; Fook 2003; Lincoln & Guba 2000). In a fundamental sense, critical realists utilise an ontological perspective that accepts the existence of an external reality; this reality, however, cannot be comprehended in a complete or unbiased manner (Guba 1990). Positivism faces critique by critical realists for the non-interactive and distant relationship between researcher and participant, as the inevitable consequence of its pursuit of knowledge separate from its origins, values, and contexts (Guba 1990). Critical theorists, conversely, might produce biased and value-laden findings in process of the interactions between researcher and research participants (Guba 1990). Critical theory proposes that a researcher cannot separate himself/herself from what he or she knows, and as such this has an inescapable impact upon the course of scientific inquiry. The boundaries of possible knowledge are continuously reconstructed through the interactions between researcher and participant.

Social reality is based upon the understanding that people's perceptions on the same event or circumstance will differ. Hence, by adopting a critical approach, the researcher aims to reflect upon how people see the world, and to comprehend the actions, reasons, and

motivations behind their particular perceptions and behaviours. The latter implies that the critical approach adopts a convenient subjectivist stance, as the researcher and the participant are interactively linked, and this as such underpins the initial assumption that the outcome are a creative product in this most literal sense (Guba 1990; Lincoln & Guba 2000). Dialectics, as applied in social constructivism and critical studies, further enables researchers to interpret, compare, and contrast multiple such constructions with each other; this might generate one or more constructions on which there is unanimity in reality or representation, and so gesture towards some shared or universal reality. Hermeneutics takes a separate approach, as it endeavours to precisely narrate the individual constructions created through interaction between the researcher and the participant (Guba 1990).

Application of critical approach

As the aim of this study was to identify which elements impact on how, and to what extent, particular spaces influence the behaviour and decision making of a particular tribe – gay travellers – the research adopted the critical paradigm and a qualitative framework for its inquiry and analysis. As a consequence, the knowledge obtained broadens the explanatory power of space as a fundamental element in neo-tribal theory. The review of gay tourism literature undertaken has established that the concept of gay tourism is subjective and mutable; this insight then returns to the idea that people perceive the same phenomena differently based upon their social positionalities.

Given the nature of relativist ontology, the goal of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of people's attitudes as conveyed in their own words, rather than pursuing generalisations. Additionally, and taking into account the potential sensitivities of the topic

and the relative lack of knowledge regarding the linkages between homosexuality and travel decision making, the further aim of this research was to portray the issues arising in the fullness of their complexity, rather than narrowing these meanings into a few groups or concepts. Comprehending the perceived real-world phenomena was only possible by researching multiple realities thoroughly within the context of gay tourism. The critical paradigm contributed towards understanding people's own constructions of the elements of gay tourism, as placed in the context of neo-tribal theory. The paradigm consequently enhanced knowledge of the relationship between homosexuality and holidaymaking, and enabled a deeper understanding of the role of space in neo-tribal theory.

On an epistemological level, the subjectivist stance was taken as this study required close communication between the researcher and the participants, which was highly interactive in nature. As explained by Creswell (2007), the essence of such communication is the inquirer maintaining close proximity to the participant's perceptions of their own set of circumstances. As gay travellers related their stories and their understandings of the world, the task for the researcher was to interpret the acquired information to access their broader conceptual insights and linkages. As such, the information obtained from participants was considered to be the outcome of the interactions between the researcher and the participants. The subjectivity inherent to this process assisted in inductively building upon existing knowledge of neo-tribal theory.

Concerning methodology, a hermeneutic approach was aligned well with the research questions, and thus allowed the researcher to depict the views of individual gay travellers accurately. The dialectic extension of this, on the other hand, facilitated comparison and contrast of these various constructions with one another. The latter facet was significant to

this study, as it functioned as a tool for the assessment of possible differences and similarities between gay travellers' behaviours, motivations, and decision making processes, as applied to their particular shared space.

As previously outlined, the critical paradigm does not necessarily seek to provide outcomes which can be readily generalised. With this in mind, the aim of this study is to provide the answers to the research questions, and to enhance the knowledge of the theory as it stands, rather than to develop a novel theory. Most of the literature relating to gay people's attitudes and behaviours has adopted a positivist stance: researchers have used quantitative methods, and implicitly distanced themselves from participants (Binnie 1997; Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Hughes, Monterrubio & Miller 2010). Positivist approaches encourage fragmentation, whereas constructivism provides individual, subjective, and contextually-contingent knowledge. A distant, non-interactive approach and the methodological pursuit of definite and objective knowledge, as inherent to a positivist approach (Lincoln & Guba 2000), would have been inadequate to addressing the elusiveness of robust evidence for the existence of these sensitive phenomena. The critical approach presented a greater epistemological possibility opening for my research project, especially in its evident synergies with the insider perspective. The central aim of this study was to immerse myself in the realities of a particular tribe – gay travellers – and to then empower them to share their perceptions of the world. The critical paradigm and qualitative methods therefore yield greater insights, and provide thicker understandings of these phenomena. Furthermore, the positivist paradigm is here unsuitable, as it uses deductive processes to test the existing theory (Guba 1990).

Schwandt (1990) outlines three methodological strands that seek to portray, explore, and interpret the realm of intersubjective meanings, as constituted in culture, language, symbols, and so on. These three methodological strands are as following: the ethnographic, the ontological, and the moral-political. The ethnographic methodological strand was appropriate for this research, as the research matches the following six aspects defined by Schwandt (1990, p. 266):

- The aim is to depict the subject's experience 'as it is lived or felt', as much as is possible.
- The inquiry has to be undertaken within the realm of its particular context, where the particular experience has meaning.
- The context in which the phenomenon occurs has to be natural, and not created artificially.
- The researcher should give regard to the particular context and experience as situated temporally, socio-culturally, and geographically.
- The research is undertaken by applying 'the investigator-as-instrument' technique, meaning that fieldwork methods should be exerted.
- The researcher adapts forms of inductive analysis for his or her inquiry, and avoids the hypothetic-deductive approach.

The choice of the ethnographic methodological strand, and the flexibility innate to the critical paradigm, have resulted in the use of multi-methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation, including informal conversations.

Qualitative research

In order to investigate the role and importance of space as a point of coherence for gay travellers, and its relationship with neo-tribal theory, this research employed the interpretive/constructivist paradigm within a qualitative framework. The nature of the study is exploratory, and as such requires depth of information in order to comprehend emerging phenomena. The choice of the qualitative methodology was predicated upon the idea that qualitative methods provide 'thick' accounts and 'from the inside out' perspectives (Fetterman 2010; Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke 2004). 'Thick' in this sense means rich, contextualised and nuanced insights.

A qualitative approach draws attention to the qualities of entities that cannot be measured statistically. The meaning and understanding of participants' worldviews is constructed through the intimate relationship between researcher and participant (Denzin & Lincoln 2000). These qualities exist with regard to a specific milieu, and furthermore are determined by posing such questions as *what*, *how*, *when*, *where*, and *why* (Berg & Lune 2012). This form of inquiry is capable of providing rich, insightful, contextual, complex and multi-dimensional findings (Mason 2010; Patton 2002). By contrast, a quantitative approach focusses upon counting and measuring objective realities, independent of their contexts by using standardised – statistical – measures; as a result, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is distal, and inherently non-interactive (Neuman 2003; Patton 2002).

Qualitative and quantitative research also differs in sample size and data collection methods. Quantitative researchers collect large samples of data that provide hard, reliable, broad, rigorous and generalisable findings, whereas qualitative researchers gather purposefully-

selected smaller samples, and aim to present in-depth and detailed findings (Bryman 1999; Patton 2002). Quantitative research adopts a nomothetic mode of reasoning, such that findings are not bound by time and place, and can be tested through replication; qualitative inquiry intends to adopt an ideographic mode of reasoning, creating findings which are time and locale-specific (Bryman 1999).

Due to the detached and static nature of the quantitative approach, it cannot always depict the role and extent of change in social life, and consequently holds a limited capacity to comprehend contested meanings and perceptions (Bryman 1999; Riley & Love 2000). Bryman (1999) notes further that quantitative researchers, unlike qualitative researchers, rarely investigate the processes that connect different variables. Despite these negative aspects, a quantitative approach generates a significant amount of standardised data due to its ability to analyse and statistically compare large numbers of people, with respect to a limited and pre-determined set of questions (Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke 2004; Patton 2002). The latter establishes generalisability and gestures towards causality in a concise manner, allowing the researchers to test hypotheses (Patton 2002). One challenge of qualitative research is to adapt to its weak ability to generalise outcomes, which consequently reduces its potential to replicate and validate its findings (Bryman 1999; Patton 2002). This said, Mason (2010, p. 1) debunks the latter, suggesting that:

> The qualitative habit of intimately connecting context with explanation means that qualitative research is capable of producing very well-founded *cross-contextual generalities*, rather than aspiring to more flimsy de-contextual versions.

A further challenge of qualitative research is its unavoidable subjectivity. While the quantitative approach values the detachment of the researcher from the participant, the

qualitative researcher is dependent upon his or her subjective insights (Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke 2004; Patton 2002). This results in questions as to the credibility and rigour of qualitative research (Patton 2002). Nonetheless, the advantages of qualitative research lie in its ability to explore connections between events and happenings, to generate theories, to elaborate and extend existing knowledge, as well as to reach thorough understanding of the behaviours and motivations of the participant (Bryman 1999; Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke 2004; Patton 2002; Robson 2011).

Research design: gay travellers and neo-tribalism

As mentioned earlier, considerable number of studies on gay travellers' attitudes have adopted a quantitative framework and positivist stance. For example, Clift and Forrest's (1999) study on holiday motivations, sexual activity, and sexual risk behaviours while on holiday, used a surveying method, while Melián-González, Moreno-Gil and Araña (2011) employed Bayesian model averaging to determine which assets play a pivotal role in drawing gay travellers to sun and beach destinations. A growing body of literature does however use a qualitative approach to explore gay tourism phenomena. Hughes, Monterrubio and Miller (2010) used open-ended interviews to describe and analyse the host community's attitudes towards gay tourists, in a small beach village in Mexico. Similarly, Hughes and Deutsch (2010) employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to understand the leisure needs of older gay men, while Pritchard et al. (2000) used in-depth interviews and focus-groups to draw the parallels and linkages between sexuality and holiday choices.

Despite neo-tribal theory being a relatively new and unexplored set of conceptual terms and ideas in the field of tourism, a notable body of literature has employed a qualitative approach in conjunction with neo-tribal theory to explore certain phenomena. Hardy, Hanson and Gretzel (2012), for example, used content analysis to explore specific neo-tribes as represented on RVing websites in the USA and Australia. Grounded theory within a qualitative approach, using focus groups and in-depth interviews, was employed by Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013) to examine the behaviours and motivations of RVers as typified by certain neo-tribal characteristics. Goulding and Shankar (2011) adopted a Glaserian approach to grounded theory, and utilised in-depth interviews and observation methods to investigate the meanings and experiences of research participants attending nightclubs; participants were found to possess certain neo-tribal qualities and ritualised behaviours. Similarly, Robards and Bennett (2011) applied in-depth semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis within the qualitative tradition, in order to explore youth online identity expression from the neo-tribal perspective. There arguably exists a reciprocal relationship between the neo-tribal theoretical perspective and qualitative inquiry. It has been suggested that neo-tribal theory necessitates a qualitative approach, as the theory explicitly concerns sensitive phenomena, and a quantitative exploration of these phenomena might lead only to an inadequacy of credible evidence of what is intended to be explored (Greenacre, Freeman & Donald 2013). As Greenacre, Freeman and Donald (2013, p. 954) note:

> It is questionable whether a quantitative approach to the application of […] [neo-tribal theory] is able to detect sensitive phenomenon, such as temporal order in community formation. This need for sensitivity presents an interesting challenge for methodological

> selection. The choice of a quantitative method can result in great difficulty in assessing the absence of sensitive phenomena, as they simply won't appear in the results.

As Greenacre et al. (2013) suggest, the reasoning behind selecting qualitative research methods for this study was to gain a 'more authentic' and 'less exploitative' picture, which is backed by deep insights into people's sensitive behaviours and attitudes, as opposed to broader generalisations (Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Hughes, Monterrubio & Miller 2010; Pritchard et al. 2000). Moreover, the impetus for adopting a qualitative and not quantitative approach emerges from the evident truth that '[…] if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is their ability to talk. It is only by talking to people, […] that we can find out what they are thinking, and understanding their thoughts goes a long way towards explaining their actions' (Myers 2013, p. 6).

Ethnographic methods

Beyond the broadest frame of qualitative enquiry, there remain open questions of methodology and analysis for the pursuit of knowledge of these sensitive phenomena. To these ends, an ethnographic approach provides research methods and techniques for the analysis of cultural practises, and for the depiction of social change and of the processes by which particular social phenomena are constructed (Atkinson & Hammersley 1998; Bryman & Bell 2007; Creswell 2007; Lüders 2004; Tedlock 2000). Ethnography is concerned with the examination of holistic real life perspectives, and the functional relationships between members of a group, based on observations and analyses of 'people in interaction in ordinary settings' and 'pervasive patterns such as life cycles, events, and cultural themes'

(Creswell 2007, p. 71). LeCompte and Schensul (1999) enumerate the following ethnographic data collection methods: observations, tests and measures, surveys, interviews, content analysis, elicitation methods, audio-visual methods, spatial mapping, and network research. As suggested by Atkinson and Hammersley (1998), ethnographic researchers generally deal foremost with 'unstructured data' which are not coded during the data collection process.

As outlined previously, this research undertook to better understanding of the role of space as the point of coherence around which neo-tribes form, and to achieve this through study of the motivations and behaviours of gay travellers. Ethnographic research facilitated the achievement of these aims by promoting a close embeddedness of the researcher in the environs of gay tourism. The assertion has been made that the social world cannot be researched without being part of it, and this stands as a core tenet of this research project (Tedlock 2000). The results of this work, and the reflections of the researcher, arrive in concord with Tedlock's (2000) argument the application of ethnographic techniques enable a greater understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of the participant. This work maintains that consciousness of gay traveller's motivations, beliefs and behaviours contribute towards legitimising the spatial characteristic as it exists within neo-tribal theory. From the ethnographic perspective, space provides a particularly fluid, productive, and dynamic basis for engagement (Davies 2009). These sentiments are elaborated by Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy (2014, p. 641), in that 'neo-tribes may be organised around interim […] places (locations), as the emergence of the neo-tribes is an outcome of the collective conquest of a space'. In the broadest sense, the insights of this project reassert the potential for ethnographic methods to provide more holistic social accounts, and that

these methods are especially useful in establishing linkages between the elements of the neo-tribal theory.

Ethnographic research differs from other types of qualitative inquiry in the degree to which the researcher becomes immersed in the fieldwork; this fieldwork being the very reality of the group researched. Despite this positionality, several authors argue that the researcher exists both within and around a particular field (Creswell 2007; Davies 2009; Tedlock 2003). Tedlock (2000) advances that a researcher, who is an insider, possesses an advantage in terms of gathering unequivocal facts and data, which then contribute towards gaining in-depth insights and access into daily routines. As such, as a gay man myself I was able to act as an insider researcher, and I assert that this has ensured a more authentic and productive form of research. Literature suggests further that such a position renders:

> […] not only a democratistion of knowledge but a new critical awareness, resulting in the suggestion that the class, race, culture, and gender beliefs and behaviours of the inquirer be placed within the same historical moment, or critical plane, as those of the subjects of inquiry (Tedlock 2000, p. 466).

By hewing to the 'embeddedness' principle of ethnographic research, the methods chosen enabled the researcher to gather empirical insights into social routines potentially inaccessible to the general public. Ethnographic methods not only then yield substantial and insightful knowledge of gay travellers' behaviours, but the ethnographic approach further provides a particular thickness, and richness of detail of processes in their contexts. This represents a chance to understand how particular spaces impact the motivations, behaviours and beliefs of gay travellers, and the inverse, in how these behaviours, motivations, and beliefs shape and delineate spaces themselves. The benefits of insider

research are explored in more detail in Chapter 6. The argument for ethnographic methods is sustained for this research project, as they match closely its aims to better comprehend whichever aspects legitimise the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory.

Both the non-intrusive nature of the research and its limited time frame led to this study employing the following methods: participant observation – including non-formal 'chat-type' conversations – and in-depth interviews. These specific ethnographic methods seemed particularly appropriate for this research for the many reasons outlined in the following paragraphs.

As outlined above, a qualitative method for the conducting of research interviews was chosen based upon the assumption that such a method provides valid and reliable data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). Interviewing is notably useful as a means to gather data in instances where the research design attempts examination of people's behaviours, motivations and opinions (Patton 2002; Rubin & Rubin 2012), and these exigencies and considerations were clearly applicable to this study. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012, p. 3), qualitative interviews enable the researcher to scrutinise 'the experiences, motives and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own'. To phrase this differently, and following from the argument expressed by Mason (2010), the researcher adopts an ontological stance which holds that 'people's knowledge, views, understanding, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality' (Mason 2010, p. 63). The epistemological stance is built subsequently upon these ontological properties, which are themselves constructed through the direct and active interaction between the inquirer and the participant (Mason 2010).

Situating the research

The fieldwork took place in an exclusively gay and lesbian resort in Far North Queensland, Australia, between the months of September and October 2014. In the interests of best separating my research from the commercial reputation of the resort, and from the private lives of its patrons, I have deliberately elected to omit the name of the resort in this manuscript. The resort lies within a remote area of tropical rainforest, approximately 45 km from Cairns' international airport, and 5 km away from the closest township. It houses 30 rooms; an outdoor swimming pool and hot tub; and a gym, restaurant, and bar. These amenities extend onto a secluded and otherwise undisturbed beachfront, which in the absence of any competition the resort confidently claims as its own.

The business agreed to my conducting of the fieldwork in exchange for voluntary and unremunerated work. My duties were diverse; among other tasks, I drove the company car to deliver goods, worked at the resort reception, conducted marketing and social-media work, and helped occasionally in the kitchen. These tasks themselves offered multiple points of engagement in my professional role as researcher, not only with the resort visitors but also with its staff – my colleagues – an opportunity which translated into a more rigorous and richer data-collection process. I explore my duties at the resort, and the environment itself, in a greater detail in Chapter 6.

Participant recruitment

The two distinct modes of data collection of this study required two different approaches to participant recruitment. The first of these methods is semi-structured interviews. While

there are no fixed guidelines as to what is the perfect number of interviews that have to be conducted, a certain emphasis should be put on the depth, nuance, complexity and roundness of the data generated; data collection can continue until this point of informational saturation has been reached (Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006; Mason 2010). In the course of conducting this research, an assumption was made that 23 semi-structured interviews with 26 self-identifying gay men is sufficient to ensure the data collected were rich and representative, and that theoretical saturation would then be attained (Gold 1997; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006). This saturation became evident, as no novel themes emerged from the data collected towards the end of the study. As this research is of qualitative and not quantitative nature, the numerical quantity of participants was based foremost upon the maximum feasible within the timeframe of this project. This study used a convenience-based sample; that is, selection included any individual available and willing to participate in the study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech 2007). None of the participants were rejected from taking part in the interview process. Each and every individual who checked-in to the resort during the duration of the data collection process was given a leaflet providing information about the study, and containing an invitation to participate. Visitors were provided with the option to request participation in the study by either contacting the researcher via the e-mail address, provided on the leaflet, or by advising staff working at the front desk. I additionally approached and invited the resort's patrons to take part in the research through informal conversation at various locations around the resort. All interview participants were introduced to the project by providing them with information sheets establishing the purpose of the interview, and of the study. Participation was on an entirely voluntary basis, and no financial compensation or other incentive was provided for their time.

The interviews were recorded digitally, and later transcribed for thematic analysis using NVivo software. As described by Patton (2002, p. 463) 'developing some manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis.' It is further explained that content analysis usually comprises of identifying, coding, categorising, classifying, and labelling the primary patterns in the data (Patton 2002). For the purpose of this research project, the interview transcripts were coded using both a priori and inductive codes. A priori codes were developed through an understanding of the neo-tribal literature (Willis 2013) and were structured around four neo-tribal characteristics: fluidity in membership, rituals and symbols, shared sentiment, and space. From this coding the categories were grouped together (axial coding). As such, key themes were identified and the relationships between codes were located. As suggested by Willis (2013) some segments of the interviews were coded with more than one code as the concepts and the emerging themes overlapped.

As outlined above, 26 participants in total were recruited for interview. These participants are listed in Table 6, alongside some non-identifying demographic information. The names included in the table, and used throughout this manuscript, are aliases intended to respect the privacy of participants. Interviewees were aged between 27 and 63, and the mean age of participants was 44. One participant declined to provide their age. Twenty of the participants were from Australia – predominantly from the state of Victoria – and 6 of the respondents were foreign, hailing from Israel, New Zealand, the USA and the United Kingdom. The Australian Standard Geographical Classification's Remoteness Structure was used to sort participants by their places of normal residence (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Although I elected not to question participants about their income, so as to maintain

an easy rapport through the interviews, it can be observed readily that the majority were in professional or administrative work. It is worth noting that an average economy return airfare from Melbourne (Victoria) or Sydney (New South Wales) to Cairns (Queensland) is between $550.00 and $950.00 (Australian dollars). The resort's accommodation costs between $200.00 and $330.00 (Australian dollars) per night.

Table 7: List of interview participants

No.	Name	Age	Occupation	Place of residence
1	Jason	39	Business owner	Major city – Victoria
2	Saxon	63	Medical practitioner	Major city – Victoria
3	Dominic	59	School teacher	Inner regional – Victoria
4	Dean	39	Real-estate agent	USA
5	Graham	43	Medical sales	Major city – New South Wales
6	Shaun	53	Sales	Inner regional – Victoria
7	Geoff	51	Business and investment manager	New Zealand
8	Nathan	51	National manager for a public agency	New Zealand
9	Charlie	50	Film and sound archivist	Major city – Australian Capital Territory
10	Phil	41	Computer programmer	Major city – Victoria
11	Campbell	N/A	Hair trimming technician	Major city – Victoria
12	Toby	35	TV producer	Major city – New South Wales
13	Jayden	27	Self-employed	Major city – Queensland
14	Thomas	42	Business director	United Kingdom
15	Alexander	38	Administrator	United Kingdom
16	Sam	45	Outreach worker	Major city – Victoria
17	Gerry	34	Office worker	Major city – Victoria
18	Caleb	50	Nurse	Major city – Victoria
19	Zach	30	Parole officer	Major city – New South Wales
20	Patrick	30	TV producer	Major city – New South Wales
21	John	56	Unemployed	Major city – Victoria
22	James	38	School principal	Inner regional – South Australia
23	Bryan	46	Freelance consultant	Israel
24	Peter	55	Consultant	Major city – Victoria
25	Anthony	45	Journalist	Major city – Queensland
26	Arthur	49	Volunteer	Major city – Victoria

The substantial cost of travelling to the resort represents a narrowing of the potential sample for this research, and inevitably narrows participant diversity. This can be observed in the spread of occupations among participants. In this vein, while the resort's remoteness

enabled novel observations of an LGBT-exclusive space, cost among other factors may have reduced the diversity of LGBT people to be observed there.

The second method employed by this study was participant observation. All of the gay and lesbian resort's visitors, and its staff, were part of the observation method. No special recruitment method was necessitated, as the presence of these people meant by definition that they become participants, and that they form a part of the prevailing ethnographic milieu (Fetterman 2010; Patton 2002). This study employed an overt observation method. No written consent was requested, as in participant observation studies it is virtually impossible to obtain consent from all individuals observed; this decision is in accordance with the *'Human Research Handbook'* (National Health and Medical Research Council 2002). To provide a passive from of consent, information about the ongoing process of observation, over this particular period of time and at specific locations at the resort, was disseminated through posters placed in accessible and prominent locations: the entrance to the resort, the reception area, and the bar/restaurant area. Participants who did not wish to be observed had, as such, this option to not participate by avoiding the locations described at the provided times. The poster informed potential participants about the study, provided contact details, and detailed the duration of observation sessions. Consent was not needed for observation in public areas, such as the beach.

Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive nature of this research ethical considerations were of prime concern. Ethnographic studies demand scrutiny and care when they stray into these sensitive areas,

and have to be guided by codes of ethical practice to ensure consent and to respect the privacy of participants. This ethical scrutiny itself 'sharpens the senses' and enhances the quality of the endeavour, and the data derived from such studies (Fetterman 2010, p. 150). To ensure high ethical standards throughout the research process, I obtained approval for the collection of data from the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethics Reference Number: H14212) (The Tasmania Social Sciences HREC 2014), the work of which is guided by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (National Health and Medical Research Council 2002). The interview schedule, consent form, information sheet, and the informational poster/leaflet can be found in the Appendix 4 to this manuscript.

The interview schedule comprised two sections. The first section of ten questions guided the semi-structured interview process, whereas the second section of the schedule collected demographic data through five supplementary questions. This section collected data regarding participants' ages, sex, sexual identities, Australian post codes or home countries, and occupational status. All interview participants were assigned an alias to ensure these data are non-identifiable. No further personal demographic details were collected.

Though not expected, there remained a low chance that gay and lesbian resort patrons participating in these interviews might experience anxiety or distress as a result of the knowledge that their actions, behaviours, and responses were being monitored closely as part of this research. Participants were advised that they had the right to decline to answer any question, or withdraw from the interview at any time. In order to protect participants further, each was permitted to view and amend the transcripts of their own interviews; no

participant expressed the need or desire to do so. Participants were never asked questions that could reveal their identities in the transcripts. Specific effort was made to ensure participants were not compelled to commit any act that could have diminished their self-respect or cause them to experience shame, embarrassment or regret as a result of their involvement in the study. Some participants performed acts unprompted and voluntarily which could be regarded as such, and these acts were noted as part of the observation method. These data remain non-identifiable.

In summary, extensive care was given to the ethical implications of this research. The Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee oversaw this process, and provided additional assurance and accountability that community concerns would be respected. All efforts were made to guarantee no participants would be affected adversely by the research process.

Conclusion

In this second of the bridging chapters of this dissertation, I have provided the rationale for the theoretical framework and the combination of methodologies selected for this study. This chapter outlined the pertinent issues and provided key information underpinning the research described in further detail in the subsequent chapters. By providing a broad overview of the literature concerning critical qualitative research, and by explaining the tenets of ethnography, this chapter is intended to equip the reader to evaluate and intimately understand the methods and results of this research project. It sought further to build the specific case for ethnography as the methodological approach best aligned with

neo-tribalism, as here applied in the context of gay tourism. It was my intention to provide extensive background information describing the ethnographic methods I used: in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation. My participant selection process, and ethical considerations taken into account, are likewise detailed. Disclosure is here essential to establish the processes I undertook as the researcher to ensure the quality of this study, and of the data it generated. This chapter as such addresses issues pertinent to the methodological framework here adopted, which were beyond the scope of the published papers making up Chapters 6, 7 and 8 of the thesis.

The chapter following applies the ethnographic approach to understand better a single and specific tourism culture – this gay resort, in all its particularity. It discusses issues relating to insider perspectives, and the formative research potential of rapport building with participants, participant observations, the respect of participants, and embeddedness in the research environment.

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CHAPTER

6

The shared oasis: An insider ethnographic account of a gay resort

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Abstract

The literature pertaining to critical tourism studies has sought to challenge the traditional scientific dichotomy between the detached researcher and research participant in the production of tourism knowledge. This paper argues for the value of an ethnographic approach in further challenging that dichotomy, by way of a study seeking to better understand a specific culture in tourism: gay resorts. We aim to outline the methodological component of this research project, centred on a gay resort in Australia, and to argue for the value of ethnography in understanding other specific tourism cultures. Often a researcher's proximity to and pronounced familiarity with a topic is obfuscated in service of 'non-biased' and 'value-neutral' results, but in this paper we attend closely to the value of insider research in critical tourism studies. The experiences reported here – around insider perspectives, rapport-building, in-depth interviews, participant observations, becoming embedded in a research environment, and respecting participants – are argued to have much wider currency.

Key words: critical studies, ethnography, gay tourism, reflexivity, gay resort, insider approach

Introduction

Over the last decade, scholars within the field of tourism have become increasingly discontented with positivist enquiry towards creating tourism knowledge; arguably, the new era of critical tourism studies began (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard 2007; Hollinshead 2006; Jamal & Hollinshead 2001; Ren, Pritchard & Morgan 2010; Wilson & Hollinshead 2015). This transition not only brought a high level of transdisciplinary expertise into the field but also resulted in a more reflexive, ethical, responsible, and nuanced form of research. It can be advanced that critical research has adopted a stance privileging voices of those who are marginalised based upon their gender, social status, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., in an active effort to counteract societal discrimination. For example, Grimwood (2015) took a critical approach in studying the perceptions and representations of Arctic Aboriginal inhabitants, and their relations in the context of promoting cooperative spaces for fair and sustainable Arctic tourism. Grimwood argued that tourism in the Arctic is strongly associated with Western-centric perceptions of modernity, whereas the voices of Aboriginal inhabitants remain silenced. Similarly, Waitt, Markwell and Gorman-Murray (2008) set out to present critical insights into recent tourism research which contest and challenge the imposed heteronormative stance, by contending that investigation of the queer challenge to normalcy demands a fruitful blurring of boundaries, with leisure and queer studies, sociology and anthropology all present in this novel disciplinary mix.

The growing body of critical reflexive research within tourism studies has aimed not only to challenge the inherited positivist methods of doing ‘science’, but has also attempted to question how we as tourism and leisure researchers address and communicate qualitative research. As Dupuis (1999, p. 44) pointed out, even though studies may be accompanied by

declarations of their interpretivist, constructivist or critical manner, interpretations of one's qualitative research often continue to be infused with a 'quasipositivist' aftertaste. Furthermore, the emergence of the critical and as such reflexive approach in contemporary tourism research has ignited debate over the roles of the researcher and participants (or the more contested 'subjects'), and the nature of the relationships between them (Ateljevic et al. 2005).

Often a researcher's individuality, as well as his or her proximity to and pronounced familiarity with a topic, is obfuscated in service of 'non-biased' and 'value-neutral' results. The prevailing positivist ideology of science has artificially isolated the researcher from the 'object' of the study (the researched) in order to produce purported 'scientific objectivity' (Dupuis 1999). In this context, the extant literature pertaining to critical tourism studies has sought to challenge the traditional scientific dichotomy between the morally shaped individual and the purposely detached researcher in the production of tourism knowledge (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Dupuis 1999; Pocock 2015).

This paper follows a call for more embedded research, where the divide between the objective and the personal is blurred (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Dupuis 1999; Ren, Pritchard & Morgan 2010). We are further following the sentiment expressed by Dupuis (1999, p. 59), who believes that 'our selves and our emotions and personal experiences can[not] be removed from the research process'. Building upon this idea, it could be argued that by adopting a reflexive stance towards research one attempts to generate knowledge through his or her lived experiences. As argued by Pocock (2015, p. 31) in a similar vein, reflexivity does not only signify a style of writing, but also encompasses an entire epistemological

stance, where 'the embodied and emotional researcher [intersects] with the entire research process'.

In this paper, I (the lead author)[4] reflect upon the course of actions in which my methodological approach has been shaped by my position as a gay man alongside my cultural and social upbringing. Through a continually emergent and transforming process, I negotiated the proximity and relationship with my participants whilst undertaking ethnographic fieldwork at a gay resort in Far North Queensland, Australia for six weeks between September and October 2014. The fieldwork involved working at the resort, undertaking participant observation, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants. In this paper, we ultimately explore the impact that my embodiment – my physical and mental 'self' – and various adopted positions and interactions throughout the fieldwork had upon my research and how that was translated in my understanding of the prevailing culture at a gay-and-lesbian-only resort. As such, we will be touching upon the use of the ethnographic methods and the notion of short-term ethnography. This is not to imply that short-term ethnography is itself a novel research undertaking, but rather to emphasize the inherent opportunities these methods offer in tourism and leisure research. In saying this, as an 'insider' I aim to provide 'outsiders' closer understanding and guidance on designing sound methodology for gay travel research.

Critical and reflexive approaches towards tourism research have encompassed a wide range of issues pertaining to the collaborative roles between the researcher and the researched.

[4] The shift in this paper between personal pronouns (we and I) was a deliberate choice. The pronoun 'I' is used to identify the insights and reflections on the fieldwork itself undertaken by the lead author, whereas the pronoun 'we' is used to identify areas of joint analysis and the central argument of the paper.

For example, emotion (see Pocock 2015), religion's bearing on epistemology (see Belhassen 2012), and nature and relationality (see Grimwood 2011). However, it is unclear and curious, although acknowledged in text, as to how, why and to what degree the rapport building process has potentially had impact on such research. Caton (2013) has argued that rapport is not just a tool that helps to comprehend how participants view and interpret their lives, but a 'moral imperative' that has to be mutually established. Hence, we aim to reflect upon rapport building process, and the establishment of an 'insider' role as a gay researcher working in and studying a gay resort.

The focal point of this paper is to offer reflexive insights into the methodological complexities that I as an insider researcher encountered and grappled with *in situ*. In saying this, my role here was the one of the *bricoleur*, who 'understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 6). To expand upon the aforementioned qualities, the central element characterising the mutual relationship between myself and my participants was a common sexual orientation – homosexuality. Furthermore, researcher-as-*bricoleur* draws upon a rich and luscious cluster of methodological tools, practices and strategies in the production of *bricolage*, a reflective, dense and quilt-like mosaic that provides an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; Jamal & Hollinshead 2001). Essentially, we aim to contribute to the discussions for effective research and provide fine grained understandings of boundaries and issues that impact upon the making of tourism knowledge.

Gay tourism and evolving social attitudes towards homosexuality

The growing body of academic research pertaining to gay tourism has sought to address the issues arising from the societal and political change around the world and its impacts upon the gay travel market (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Browne & Bakshi 2011; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). Indeed, Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy (2016) have highlighted that the development of gay tourism is robustly dependent upon the prevailing societal turns and political decisions that break the stagnant hegemonic perceptions of the implied heteronormative 'normality', and contribute to the spread of homosexual rights. As of 1 June 2016, 22 countries and a dozen other territories have introduced laws allowing same-sex marriage indicating that same-sex marriage is becoming more commonplace. One of the latest examples reflecting such a poignant change is Ireland that has become the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote (Referendum Returning Officer 2015). Conversely, whilst the debate around marriage equality in Australia and elsewhere makes evident the growing acceptance of homosexual people in society, it likewise signals the extent to which queer people have been grouped into a heteronormative construct of relationships and linear life patterns. There is a precedent and, indeed, tendency for homosexuals to mimic established heteronormative norms and domestic-life-patterns in order to seek validation by the heterosexual majority. The liberalisation of attitudes towards gay people and the proliferation of positive gay images in public domains has triggered the emergence of 'homonormativity' – the (faux) countermovement of heteronormativity (Brown 2012). We describe it as a faux countermovement as we follow the idea expressed by Lisa Duggan (2002). Fundamentally, she describes homonormativity as a mainstream gay discourse that endeavours to augment

rather than subvert and disparage heteronormative trends, principally by capitalising upon forms of gay identity and cultural integrity that fit into a normative, hetero mould: monogamy, the idealisation of marriage-like relationships, and measuring success through material gains. Homonormativity, here, sits in contrast to a more radical conceptualisation of 'queer' as counter-cultural and anti-establishment.

Although the emergence of such homonormative trends and the theory of homonormativity itself is not at the centre of this paper, it should be understood that there are both positive and negative aspects surrounding this concept. Positive outcomes seem to be self-explanatory as they, for example, give an impetus for transformation in the legal lives and liberties of gay men and women (e.g. legalisation of same-sex marriages, same-sex adoption laws) (Harding 2011). However, one of the negative aspects of the homonormative trend is that white wealthier, middle- and upper-class, able-bodied homosexuals tended to be privileged; especially, those that are most similar to their heterosexual counterparts and follow aligned behavioural life patterns, such as forming long-lasting monogamous relationships and rearing children (Brown 2012; El-Tayeb 2012). Homonormativity fails to account for or even obfuscates the lives and experiences of many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people, who live alternative ways of connecting, belonging and relating (Brown 2012). This is not to say that all homosexual people willingly follow the homonormative pattern, but rather are often trapped in an inertia-like motion as dictated by the surrounding majority and culture, akin to driving within deep grooves along a gravel road that one must follow, as per conventional logic, to avoid getting stuck and to continue moving forward.

As outlined previously, the last decade has marked tremendous developments for gay rights, especially in the Western World. Considerable human rights violations still prevail in many parts of the world. It should be noted that historically, conservative discourses have framed homosexuality as immoral and to some extent this attitude persists in societal psyche. For instance, even in Australia and other Western countries, LGBTIQ people continue to experience poor mental health and elevated suicide rates, in addition to discrimination, harassment, and violence when compared to heterosexuals (Leonard et al. 2012).

According to Rosenfeld (2009, p. 19) 'heteronormativity is a rich and complex field out of which sexual subjectivities are fashioned, but also out of which moral claims, and social connections and divisions, are crafted', which suggests a deeply-rooted moral divide within this binary discourse: that between heteronormativity and 'Otherness'. Arguably, the prevalence of conservative discourses and implied immoralities shapes the distinctive motivations and behaviours of gay travellers: to elide the expectations of heteronormative everyday lives, travellers escape to 'oases of shared moralities', whether a gay cruise, a pride festival, or a gay resort.

Clift and Forrest (1999) uncovered three prevalent facets defining the motivations of homosexual travellers: 'gay social life and sex', 'culture and sights' and 'comfort and relaxation'. It has been posited that gay men travel to escape day-to-day heteronormative patriarchal-derived realities and spend time in safe and bully-free environments, where they could freely express their sexuality and engage with other similar-minded gay men (Clift & Wilkins 1995; Pritchard et al. 1998; Waitt & Markwell 2006). It has also been suggested that unfamiliar destinations can provide closeted gay men with the opportunity for some level of freedom from the constraints of the social and cultural conditions under which they might

normally live (Monterrubio 2009; Pritchard et al. 1998; Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). 'Gay' destinations offer gay travellers potential anonymity, giving them the chance to temporarily 'come out' and be open about their sexuality, and to potentially enact a new identity away from the pressures of their everyday lives (Hughes 1997; Waitt & Markwell 2006). Arguably, gay travellers seek to escape imposed heteronormative moralities, seeking respite from what Valentine (2002, p. 154) calls the 'heterosexuality of everyday spaces', looking for opportunities to engage in social interactions with like-minded gay travellers that are bound by similar norms and experiences. The escalation of the aforementioned circumstances and needs has potentially translated into the emergence of gay enclaves or gay tailored spaces. Such spaces provide 'a point of coherence where like-minded people possess a feeling of fellowship and share common interests, as well as have a sense of belonging and solidarity amongst themselves' (Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy 2016, p. 412). The inexorable need for such spaces paved the way for the development of gay services and gay venues, such as gay night-clubs, cruises, hotels and resorts.

Methodological approach: critical ethnography

Epistemologically, the aim of this research was to gather rich and meaningful insights into the everyday lives of gay resort visitors, as well as to empower them to reflect upon their lived experience of the resort. The purpose of this paper is not to fixate upon the aims and the comprehensive analysis of collected data but rather to reflect upon the methodological pathway we took in order to satisfy the proposed research questions. Consequently, one should be informed about the purpose of the research to comprehend methodological choices. The ultimate purpose of our research was to understand the role of space as a

point of coherence around which neo-tribes form by studying the motivations and behaviours of gay travellers. Neo-tribes are delineated by their rituals and symbols, and by their shared sentiments and spaces but remain ephemeral and fluid collections of people. They are as such located temporally and spatially (Hardy & Robards 2015). Upon seeking an appropriate methodological approach to fit our study we came to the realisation that ethnographic research facilitates the achievement of the aforementioned aims by maintaining a high level of researcher embeddedness in the context of gay tourism. The decision to follow the critical turn in ethnography was prompted by the inherent realities associated with studying gay, or, more generally, queer, everyday lives. Critical ethnography does not stand in opposition to conventional ethnography it rather explores social constructs and cultural commodities that stem from the sensitive narratives imposed by racial, social and sexual stigma, as well as heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies (Anderson 1989; Chang 2005).

Fundamentally, we maintain the position that the paramount principles defining gay travel research, and, more generally, queer studies, have to be built upon reflexive, nuanced and critical interpretations that penetrate an intense level of knowledge making. Arguably, the levels of high cognitive intensity and rich data production could be achieved by employing such qualitative and naturalistic strategies as case studies and ethnography. Ethnography amongst the other aforementioned qualitative approaches stands out by the degree to which it produces rich historically, politically, and personally driven accounts and representations of peoples' everyday lives and their cultural behaviour (Tedlock 2003). Essentially, knowledge about a certain social phenomenon is constructed through the interaction and relationship between the deeply embedded researcher and people representing a particular social group.

Ethnography at its core, as suggested by Patton (2002) is an established primary anthropological approach that involves an intensive long-term engagement and immersion of a researcher into a particular cultural setting. Hence, traditionally ethnography has been associated with a prolonged research process that opted to portray the everyday lives of people researched and reflect upon their beliefs, motivations, and behaviours (Tedlock 2003).

Pink and Morgan (2013) assert that ethnography is not always necessarily a long-term engagement with other human lives. Instead, it could be understood as an 'intensive excursion' or 'intervention' into the lives of people that are researched with a particular reason to target and penetrate the contextual *status quo* and immerse into the produced meanings that resonate with what the researcher is aiming to explore. Ultimately, ethnography endeavours to situate 'specific encounters, events, and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context' (Tedlock 2003, p. 165). Specifically, ethnographic research techniques are utilised to analyse cultural practises and to depict the processes by which particular social phenomena are constructed (Atkinson & Hammersley 1998; Creswell 2007; Tedlock 2003). Arguably, such techniques allow for the examination of the holistic real life perspectives and functional relationships between the members of a group, as well as 'people in interaction in ordinary setting' and a pursuit 'to discern pervasive patterns such as life cycles, events, and cultural themes' (Creswell 2007, p. 71). Generally, as suggested by Atkinson and Hammersley (1998), ethnographic researchers follow the propensity to deal first and foremost with 'unstructured data', meaning that gathered data has not been coded during the data collection process.

Setting the picture: my role at the resort

As outlined earlier, I (the lead author) conducted the fieldwork at an exclusively gay and lesbian resort in Far North Queensland between the months of September and October 2014. I spent six weeks in the tropical North as one of the employees working at the resort. My duties were diverse and involved tasks such as driving a company car to deliver goods, working at the reception, doing marketing and social-media work and occasionally helping in the kitchen. For six weeks I was sleeping, working, eating, socialising, partying and spending my free time at the resort with few exceptions. This offered multiple points of engagement not only with the resort visitors but also with other colleagues, translating into a more rigorous and rich data collection process. In compliance with the *Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans,* my research was overt in its nature (Australian Government 2007). Resort visitors and other employees were informed both verbally and in writing (by posters and leaflets around the resort) about my presence at the resort and my position as a researcher.

The resort itself is situated in a secluded area within a tropical rainforest with the closest neighbours being only approximately 5 kilometres away. Hence, some of the guests referred to the resort as being 'in the middle of nowhere' or 'on the edge of the world'. The resort prides itself in having access to their totally private, clothing optional, tropical beach. Australian winter/early spring months (June-October) are considered to be high season, whereas Australian summer/autumn months (November-May) are considered to be low season. The average length of guests' stay at the resort is 3-4 days with the majority of guests coming from Australia, New Zealand, UK and USA. The resort contains 30 rooms, outdoor swimming pool, outdoor spa (hot tub), bar, dining area and gym.

Critical ethnography in action

Following on from the notion expressed by Tedlock (2003), that the social world cannot be researched without being part of it, I must note that as a researcher I could not part myself from knowledge that I accumulated prior to entering the field. Thus by inevitability of circumstance this has had an impact upon the style of my inquiry. It can be understood that the notion of *'what is it possible to know?'* is constructed through the communication and synergies between the researcher and people that are researched. My arrival and presence in the field by default conveyed the meaning of stepping outside my habitual space. Several authors have argued–to complicate this observations–that the researcher exists both within and around a particular field (Creswell 2007; Davies 2009; Tedlock 2003). Hence, as I was occupying the dual role of researcher and employee, I was straddling a spatial dichotomy. Firstly, I had to maintain deep levels of immersion while not allowing myself to be drawn too fully into the 'resort lifestyle', and, secondly, I had to remain peripheral to the centre of attention while still ensuring the 'thickness' of data collected.

My research focus was associated primarily with a particular space – a gay resort – and the temporal relationships that are built with, within and around this space. For critical geographers, knowledge is situated in a specific location; and further, all producers of such knowledge occupy subject positions – they are embodied (Haraway 1988). By emphasising both the positionality of the researcher and that of his or her subject, these critiques of objectivity resist the tendency of the white, male, and, by extension, straight gaze to be considered objective or scientific, and for all other perspectives to be embodied and inherently biased or marked. Critical ethnography productively marks the knowledge producer as well as those researched. This perhaps resembles what Haraway (1988) terms

'situated knowledge' more closely than conventional ethnography – though there is perhaps problematic juxtaposition with notions of 'insider' knowledge, in that some subject positions still become privileged above others, along with the implicit suggestion of objectivity. By remaining mindful that objectivity remains inaccessible to the insider, and by emphasising subjectivity by situating him- or herself, reflexivity by the researcher can work to avoid 'the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge' (Rose 1997, p. 306). Despite insider positionality, and despite my own reflexivity as the critical ethnographer, much about the field will remain unknowable. These unresolved conflicts themselves further establish the instrumental role of space in knowledge production. Hence, the experience and the knowledge gained at an exclusively gay and lesbian resort might differ from other gay tourism sites and situations. For example, Gorman-Murray, Waitt and Gibson (2012) address the specificity of type of location and its relation to knowledge production by exploring gay and lesbian imaginary through urban/rural binary.

While the focus group of my research was mobile travellers, it could be argued that the gay resort provided the so-called 'habitus of collectivity'. Seemingly, my research possessed the qualities of traditional ethnographic studies. However, unlike conventional ethnographic cases, where a researcher visits the field for an extended time period, I have entered the field and remained there longer than any other resort visitor despite a relatively short research time-frame (six weeks) in ethnographic terms. This precedent has created a unique situation, where the resort visitors could not see me as an intruder or outsider simply because I was already there when they arrived. Furthermore, my homosexuality has potentially strengthened the position of being an insider and ensured more authentic research. This has helped me to place myself in the centre of the action, and I was able to

gain a greater understanding of the beliefs, motivations, and behaviours of gay travellers visiting the gay resort.

This is not to say that gay researchers immediately have a sense of rapport with all other gay people. A person's sexuality, of course, is one dimension of a much wider identity project that intersects with a range of other dimensions and structures: class, ethnicity, health, age, religion, and so on. Within a gay resort, however, sexuality comes to serve as a unifying element of intersectional identity projects, and operates as a first step for rapport building. It should also be noted that the gay resort is also a very privileged space, and its location and cost put it out of reach for many.

Tedlock (2003) argues that a researcher that is an insider has an advantage in terms of gathering unequivocal facts and data that could contribute towards gaining in-depth perspectives of daily routines. Additionally, Tedlock suggests that the inception of such a position gave the incentive to:

> '[…] not only a democratization of knowledge but a new critical awareness, resulting in the suggestion that the class, race, culture, and gender beliefs and behaviours of the inquirer be placed within the same historical moment, or critical plane, as those of the subjects of inquiry' (Tedlock 2003, p. 183).

In Bennett (2002, p. 460) words, 'knowledge of and familiarity with local surroundings has substantially assisted researchers both in their quest to gain access to particular social groups and settings and in knowing which roles to play once access has been achieved'. Being an 'insider' affords the researcher with a particular set of advantages, but also presents a series of challenges. Participants may, at the very least, take some knowledge for

granted, and at the more extreme, feel intimidated by or oppositional to another insider (Hodkinson 2005). The latter instances will be unpacked in the following section.

As a gay man and an ethnographer who had experience working in hotels, I was an 'insider' on multiple fronts. Living and working at the resort for six weeks gave me the intimate knowledge of the space that I needed to be comfortable there myself and to also impart that comfort to my participants. As a homosexual, I was also able to foster a research scenario where my participants did not feel judged or unsafe around me. Further, I was already familiar with the vernacular of gay culture and the experience of being a homosexual man in a predominantly heteronormative society. Arguably, the natural adoption of a 'native-like' insider position has conveyed an emic perspective in regard to our research. As argued by Kanuha (2000, p. 441) the emic approach implies 'a subjective, informed, and influential' stance in contrast to an etic approach 'that is more objective, distant, logical, and removed from one's project'.

Following the 'embeddedness' principle, the chosen methods enabled me to gather empirical insights into social routines that might not have been so easily available to a heterosexual researcher, or a researcher who was only visiting the resort to conduct interviews independently of the broader ethnographic embedding. It is not only, then, that the ethnographic methods could yield substantial insightful information into understanding gay travellers' behaviours; besides, it provides a particular thickness and richness of detail of processes in context – presenting a chance to understand how particular spaces impact the motivations, behaviours and beliefs of gay travellers and vice versa. In this research, the ethnographic methods have been justified striving to comprehend the aspects that legitimise the space element in neo-tribal theory.

The lived experience of the fieldwork

Despite my theoretical knowledge of what 'ethnography' is, prior to the fieldwork I had not explored what 'doing ethnography' signifies not only in terms of gathering rich in-depth data but also how to negotiate and transition between multiple roles, including that of researcher, resort receptionist, colleague, friend, and tourist. Arguably, the underlying characteristic of ethnography is learning to be 'native' as it smooths the researcher's entrance into the fieldwork, where a particular social grouping is researched (Kanuha 2000; Tedlock 2003). As a gay man, I felt confident entering into the fieldwork. I was well-aware of the gay-scene in Australia and abroad. I believed that activities such as frequenting gay bars and night clubs, using gay dating apps such as Grindr, Hornet or Scruff as well as having many immediate gay friends of various age groups has shaped my understanding of a gay identity, community and culture. However, I have never been to an exclusively gay resort, and this concept was foreign to me.

Before arriving at the resort I was determined to spend the first few days familiarising myself with the environment of the resort, and learning about my role as an employee. The resort owners provided me with the accommodation onsite in one of the guest rooms and allowed me to conduct my research in exchange for volunteer work at the resort. I spent my first few days at the resort sitting at the bar and meeting my new colleagues. I would have my diary in front of me on the bar bench, and occasionally I would write down some of my observations, as well as some of the thoughts expressed by bar staff – Noah, Liam and Tommy[5]. Noah was probably the only employee, excluding Elijah – the general manager – who was quite frank and open with me. Others were rather sceptical to begin with but

[5] All of the names used in this paper are aliases to protect the confidentiality of participants.

opened up in the following weeks. They seemed to find it difficult to comprehend the reasons behind my extended stay at the resort. Some of them, as I learned later, had a feeling that I was spying on their work performance and abilities, and that I would report them to the owner of the resort.

It did not take long to notice that majority of the people working at the resort had multiple roles; they were all more or less trained to perform the major duties, such as bar-keeping, reception work and housekeeping. When needed they would cook you a meal as well. As I would spend six weeks there, I aimed through conversations to learn or, rather, have a crash course, in the (working) culture and environment at the resort. I write the word 'working' in brackets because six of the people working at the resort were also living there: work and private lives were often blurred. The only perceptible mechanism dividing their daily routines into 'private' and 'on duty' was an old-fashioned time-clocking system.

From the very beginning I was exposed to socialising with other resort visitors. This has triggered an internal conflict in me: *Does this mean I am already collecting data? Am I ready? What do I say? How do I talk? What is my role?* On my first evening whilst I was having dinner at the bar one of the resort visitors – Jason – came and sat on a stool next to me and bombarded me with questions:

> Jason: Hi, what is your name? [...] Where are you from? […] When did you arrive? […] How long are you here? […] Is it your first time here? […] What are you doing here?

I was lost for words as I did not have any prepared answers to these questions. For a moment I felt out of my comfort zone or rather I was trying to place myself outside the suddenly emerged chaos in order to establish my role in this setting. The first thought that came into my mind was rather a defensive reflex that translated into a certain level of

mistrust*: What does he want from me?* However, Jason seemed to be an honest and genuine person. Despite the questions, we established a good connection and he was genuinely interested in talking about my research. Jason did not seem to see or treat me as a researcher but rather as a new holiday friend. There were no direct questions asked regarding our sexualities, however it was a common understanding from the conversations we had that we were both gay. The fact that I was gay writing about gay related issues, as he explained later, secured me a formal interview with him next day. In the interview I asked him:

> Interviewer: We spoke yesterday a little bit about it... You would be normally stay somewhere else when you are in the area, like Port Douglas. Now you are here, so what has changed?
>
> Jason: It's a gay resort, which means I am amongst friends, and people who are just like me. It's much more comfortable.

A few days after Jason has left, I met another guest – Dean. Similarly, when I asked him the same question, he replied:

> Most of the places I go to people treat you pretty much the same. But say if you are a single gay guy, and you are travelling alone… I really want to, and it's important for me to meet people, chat with people, and get to know them. I am travelling solo; at gay places particularly it is much easier to meet people, because we are already having a connection even before the moment you walk through the door. […] We are all gay. So right when you walk through the door, you already know that everybody sitting around you is same type of person – gay.

Over a dozen other resort visitors whom I interviewed responded to my question about the reasons why they have chosen to stay at this gay and lesbian resort with a very similar

perspective. This was also one of the main causes why they were interested in talking to me: I was in the same boat as them – a solo gay man open to socialising. In my conversations, although I identified myself as a researcher, I was not trying to present and maintain this role at all times. I rather acted as their holiday friend or a fellow traveller. As my aforementioned experiences with Jason, Dean and other resort visitors demonstrate, my insider status in this research environment was immediately established ensuring a firm rapport with participants. Consequently, this also meant that recruitment was not an issue, with many participants volunteering to participate. I believe that my position to 'drop' the mask of a professional researcher has contributed towards eliminating the boundaries of 'me' and 'them': I was one of 'them'. To strengthen this position, together with other guests I have performed the rituals specific to the resort, such as skinny dipping in the spa and the ocean, as well as having dinner at the communal table.

Despite living in Australia as an openly gay man for the past five years, my youth spent in conservative Lithuania was a time where I had to conceal my sexuality. My self-concept was dualistic: the 'true' self I realised through the phase of sexual development was held apart from that I presented to my family and wider society. My conversations with the resort visitors prompted me to revisit times when I was bullied and marginalised at school by peers and teachers due to my suspected sexuality. Expressions of intimacy, such as holding hands or kissing, had to be hidden out of sight. I recalled too how I struggled to express to my parents the causes of my anxiety and emotional highs and lows. And whilst I was 15 – 20 years younger than the majority of resort visitors, I held this experience in common with many of them, and as such my adolescence background served to bridge generational divides. Although past decades have been marked by liberalisation of Australian attitudes to homosexuality, the resort still represented an escape from social strictures and censure to

these men, even if that impetus originated in another time:

> Dominic: I think it's because even though Australia is supposed to be quite liberal […] there is still a lot of public distain for that behaviour from two men. […] [T]here is stigma attached to gay men being allowed […] to be openly affectionate. [It] almost singles you out more.
>
> Nathan: We choose to be more careful in our behaviour, be more aware of what others think and do around us. So coming to gay environment means that you can completely drop all that. And you can walk down the beach hand-in-hand, whereas I wouldn't walk down the street at home hand-in-hand.
>
> Thomas: [This is] a safe environment for a gay couple. It is a gay resort. […] [I]f you are not in a gay resort, and you are a gay couple, because you are a minority […] you just have to be careful. If you did kiss each other or something like that, you are leaving yourself open to verbal or physical abuse.

Their motivations resonated with me, and I felt that to these men the resort space represented something analogous to my first visit to a gay club, back in the Baltics. I connected with other resort visitors not only on the basis of a common sexuality (as physical attraction) but also on the interests we shared, such as talking about Eurovision Song Contest, 'Queer as Folk' or 'Little Britain'. Furthermore, we shared experiences about what it means to be gay in our everyday lives, our 'coming out' stories, or debating marriage equality laws.

One of the aims of this research is to understand whether gay people experience a sense of connectedness on account of their sexuality when they travel to a certain location, and what properties that particular location should possess to foster this type of connection. A few brief extracts from the conversations with the resort visitors below potentially legitimises the fundamental finding that resort visitors indeed connect on the basis of their sexuality:

> Graham: Coming here means having a sense of community amongst your own. As my family is in New Zealand I don't have this pleasure [to spend free time with them], so I chose to be with my other family.
>
> Dominic: [...] you can actually be almost heterosexual in your behaviour at this resort […]. […] that's a place apart from my home where I can obviously do what I like. […] you can actually come [here] and [...] be normal in terms of relationship, in showing affection, […] and guarded.
>
> Nathan: The whole gay bond thing gives you an open ticket to approach anybody and be on a common footing.

Whilst maintaining friendly relationships with the resort visitors proved to be a well-chosen strategy in terms of ensuring the 'thickness' of data collected, (I assume) my friendly and sometimes familiar behaviour on a few occasions was misconstrued. It was understood by a few resort visitors that I am sexually available and, hence, I became a subject to objectification. For example, my crotch was grabbed whilst skinny-dipping in a hot tub, and a visitor attempted to kiss me as we were having a drink. In these instances it was important to distance myself from the role of a friend or fellow resort visitor and reinforce the role of a professional researcher. On these occasions, I indicated that I was not available by simply saying 'no' and by reiterating my professional role or by 'hiding' behind a voice recorder and a notebook. In saying this, I needed to maintain a balance between achieving the objectives of my research in an ethical manner, while also ensuring that the resort environment and the experience of my participants was not compromised. The ethnographic study itself rested upon the gay resort's being a distinctly open and accepting gay environment, and I took care not to undermine this reality in my position as researcher, lest I undermine my

own work. As a researcher, I had to maintain the integrity of the resort as an escape from everyday constraints, both straight and gay:

> Graham: It makes us feel fortunate that we can have our own environment. [It is] not to segregate ourselves from the community but [it is] an opportunity to escape from that. I think we all get sick of the cultures and the scenes that we tend to get caught up in life in the cities. When we come here we can have an opportunity to pull away from all that. It's like going camping for a weekend. Getting away from all of the labels and just chilling out and relaxing.

The discussion above demonstrates that the resort visitors and I maintained a similar *Weltanschauung*, including moral norms. The interview extracts presented below make apparent that by coming to the resort people are explicitly intend to escape the imposed heteronormative constructs that are imposed by prevailing morals in mainstream Australia.

> Shaun: If we went to a heterosexual resort, I certainly wouldn't be affectionate openly to my partner.
>
> Geoff: I suppose, as gay people we have to be […] slightly more careful how we interact in general public. We work every day in jobs, where you have to […] put on a bit of a front, whereas here you can be totally yourself.
>
> Jason: […] over the last couple of years I've realised that sometimes things need to be about you, sometimes you have to give yourself some time [off]. [Here] you are not confronted by having to deal with [heterosexual] couples. […] gay couples are very different, in my experience, from straight couples. […] if you are meeting with a straight couple there is sometimes tension between the guy, who is obviously straight, and yourself […]. You very quickly get to the point when you think […] 'I am meant to be on holiday [but instead] I am trying to behave.'

These examples demonstrate that there is a general assumption that conservative discourses framing homosexuality as immoral are still prevalent in mainstream society. Arguably, these imposed heteronormative morals and norms influence the holidaying choices of gay travellers. These examples align with current presumptions that homosexuals travel to places where they can freely express their sexuality and socialise with like-minded people. Furthermore, it illustrates how shared gay-resort-visitor morality became rooted within the cognitive and physical space of the gay resort.

Discussion: Reflecting upon the fieldwork

Due to the non-intrusive nature of the research and a limited timeframe, I have employed the subsequent principal methods: participant observations, non-formal 'chat-type' conversations (part of the observation method) and in-depth interviews. Short-term ethnographic methods, especially in-depth interviewing and participant observation, seemed particularly appropriate for this research for many reasons that are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The choice of employing an ethnographic approach naturally proposes the use of the participant observation method (Patton 2002; Rock 1999). The observation method involved the systematic observation, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of participants' behaviour. Silverman (2010) suggested that the employment of the observation method in fact sets the foundation for the ethnographic research. Furthermore, Adler and Adler (1994, p. 389) portrayed observation as 'the fundamental base of all research methods' in the social and behavioural sciences. The 'immersion' aspect of

ethnography by default would require my engagement and attention. Consequently, the observation method assists in evaluating and fostering the understanding of particular situations and/or phenomena occurring in that setting. Thus, the application of this method enables researchers to put a pragmatic epistemology to work, and disregard their contemplative position (Rock 1999). Patton (2002) noted that the direct, personal contact with participants is one of the major advantages when applying observation method.

The examples presented in this paper depict a social reality where gay resort visitors, who have not met before, feel a connection based upon their sexuality. Interestingly, some of the participants adopted heteronormative-derived constructs to demonstrate their close relationship to other (homosexual) resort visitors. It is posited that a gay resort provides a family-like bond, where everyone is accepted in terms of their sexuality. Arguably, the use of heteronormative constructs (especially the family oriented construct presented by Dominic) illustrates the prevailing sentiment that some gay people do not feel that they are considered 'normal' in their everyday lives. In this instance, the resort provides a space for a homosexual 'normality' to prevail and for like-minded people to coalesce.

Patton (2002) suggested that direct observation provides more insights into understanding the particular context within which people interact. Furthermore, it is suggested that being onsite and observing the participants would allow me 'to be open, discovery oriented and inductive' (Patton 2002, p. 262). Arguably, this type of method had the potential to depict social reality more effectively than other methods. There was an expectation that through the observation of interactions between resort visitors, as well as between them and myself, the views of fellow gay travellers would be expressed in a more relaxed and non-hierarchical and natural manner. The employment of the participant observation method provided

many advantages especially in terms of building rapport. The observation of daily routines and activities, demands and behaviours of the guests at the resort, as well as engagement in informal conversations, contributed towards establishing trust between resort guests and myself. This was evident in the moments when I was asked to share my life stories, and I felt as equally accepted and involved as everyone else at the resort with no indication of me being an intruder. The fact that I was a researcher was known, but it was as though this resided in the very background of participants' mindsets, and in the interplay of the dynamics between the participants and myself. Arguably, the adoption of an insider approach has ensured a seamless rapport-building process. Consequently, such a process has potentially impacted the style in which the research was conducted as the relationship between my participants and myself was rather based upon 'native-like' interactions, and not presented through a 'they' / 'me' binary. The quality of being an 'insider' or 'native' researcher in this study could be defined through such aspects as shared gay culture, solidarity, and common morals and values.

The observation method has supplemented the in-depth interview method by filling in the gaps caused by the lack of awareness of routinely delivered tasks (Neuman 2003; Patton 2002). Resort visitors who were completing routine tasks might have not been aware of significant particularities that were evident only to me, as I was not entirely absorbed by the occurring practices. These unspoken particularities, therefore, not only have supplemented the information gained through the interview process, but have also helped me to comprehend why a particular phenomenon occurred in the first instance. On the other hand, as suggested by Patton (2002), interviewees might have been silenced by their inner consciousness and, hence, kept some of the issues unvoiced due to discomfort or, simply, by the reluctance to talk about it in an interview. Given the sensitive nature of this research, an

observation method was useful in tackling issues that participants were unwilling to discuss. For example, some of the participants were reluctant to disclose information about their sexual encounters, or their deeper relationships with other resorts guests; however, through the observation method I observed some of these relationships as they were unfolding, and even witnessed romantic and sexual moments in their lives as they happened at the resort. The very fact that I have observed, and that I was amongst these intimate moments, attests to the power of the observation method to reveal what would otherwise remain unspoken and inaccessible to myself as the researcher.

Whilst in-depth interviews provide critical information on the perceptions of participants' understandings of the world, the inclusion of observations as a method of data collection provides insights that extend beyond the 'selective perceptions' of participants (Patton 2002). Furthermore, the involvement of the resort visitors in the natural resort setting as well as the relatable identity of the researcher contributed towards drawing upon 'personal knowledge during the formal interpretation stage of analysis' (Patton 2002, p. 264). Hewing to the limits of reflexivity discussed by Haraway (1988) and Rose (1997), it must then be observed that my insider positionality introduces its own biases into the observations gathered: my proximity, in cultural and social terms, to the resort visitors becomes its own impediment to any claims of objective truth.

Conclusion

In this paper we have presented an insider ethnographic account of a gay resort, which acts as an oasis where shared identities and experiences thrive away from a sometimes

inhospitable, and otherwise contested, 'outside'. We argue that the adoption of an ethnographic methodology has provided an in-depth understanding of the culture, practices and operation of this gay resort in Queensland, Australia, and generates wider insights into issues impacting upon the making of tourism knowledge.

As a gay man myself, I (the lead author) was deemed to have a similar *Weltanschauung* as my participants, including social norms, which ensured my native-like immersion into the set environment. I have positioned myself here as an insider researcher. This has ensured a more reflexive, perceptive and authentic form of research, where people were permitted to express their morality without implied societal judgement or prejudice. This corresponds with Hodkinson's (2005, p. 134) approach to the notion of 'insider research', which suggests that proximity between researcher and those researched enacts the 'development of valuable common lessons about the probable implications of researching from such a position'.

Our methodological design was inspired by a long-term ethnographic enquiry, however due to comparative brevity the fieldwork (six weeks), as well as access and time limitations dictated by the seasonality at the resort, we opted to employ short-term ethnography instead. We do not argue here the relative merits of short- and long-term ethnography, though as suggested by Pink and Morgan (2013, p. 359), short-term ethnography endeavours to capture the 'particular temporal and spatial characteristics as well as specific qualities'.

Drawing upon insights gained from the fieldwork, we suggest that it should be easier for gay researchers to study gay people because of the comparative ease of building rapport, as well as the reservoir of tacit knowledge with respect to gay culture. The gay tourist market is

defined by niche characteristics that make it difficult for heterosexual ethnographers to study. The need for anonymity, and feelings of discrimination and sensitivity, reported in this research arguably stem from historically-derived conservative discourses that frame homosexuality as immoral. We do not suggest that heterosexuals cannot study homosexual people, but rather that in these scenarios particular measures must be taken to establish trust, and to build a rapport with gay participants in 'oases' such as this gay resort. These oases should function to collapse power hierarchies that might persist between participants and any heterosexual researcher. We further do not intend to universalise claims about the nature of gay insider positionality: such relationships depend upon the specific histories, circumstances and cultural commonalities of the researcher and those researched.

In this paper we have presented an argument for the importance of an ethnographic approach to better understand a specific, and somewhat niche, culture in tourism: gay resorts. The experiences reported here – concerning insider perspectives, rapport building with participants, participant observations, respecting participants, and becoming embedded in a research environment – may have much wider currency. While this paper has focussed on the methodological component of the project, other papers derived from the research detail our rich findings around belonging, identity, and 'tribalism' for gay tourists visiting gay resorts. These insights were, in our experience, only drawn out and made visible in this research scenario because of the specific method employed: reflexive critical ethnography. Our ethnography has opened a window onto a space for people united in their experiences of marginalisation and moral judgement from wider society. For these men the resort is an oasis of shared world-views, and a refuge of intimacy, kinship families, freedom, and connectedness.

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PART

3

FINDINGS

CHAPTER

7

Conceptualising gay neo-tribes: Exploration of travel behaviour and space

This paper has been submitted for review in a peer-reviewed journal, as follows:

Vorobjovas-Pinta, O, Conceptualising Gay Neo-tribes: Exploration of Travel Behaviour and Space

Abstract

This research sought to understand the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. In doing so, it drew upon the concept of neo-tribalism as a way to conceptualise belonging, connectedness, and affinity. Using ethnographic methods including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this research investigated whether gay travellers experience a sense of connectedness to other gay travellers, certain spaces, and specific activities because of their sexual identities. Findings revealed that space acts as a performance site, where the collective neo-tribal identity can be manifested. Additionally, it also illustrates that space is a connective thread that acts as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form and, as such, becomes an exclusive commodity itself.

Key words: gay travel, neo-tribes, space, travel behaviour, ethnography, critical studies

Introduction

Within academic literature, it has been established that sexual identity may both limit and empower multiple leisure activities and spaces (for example, Aitchison 1999; Browne & Bakshi 2011; Johnson & Samdahl 2005; Kivel 2000). It has been widely observed that there is an integral relationship between one's sexuality and space (see Binnie & Valentine 1999; Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Hughes 2003; Hughes & Deutsch 2010; Melián-González, Moreno-Gil & Araña 2011; Therkelsen et al. 2013; Waitt & Markwell 2006), yet the complexity and bi-directionality of this relationship has been neglected. Consequently, the nature of leisure and travel activities should be reconsidered. It has been posited that gay space warrants 'gay identity to be validated by relationships with others' (Hughes 2002, p. 299) and provides a strong sense of fellowship, free of antagonism and discrimination. This narrative surrounding the 'space' aspect has dominated the gay travel literature for the last three decades (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013; Clift & Wilkins 1995; Hughes 2002; Mendoza 2013).

There remains the question of how best to approach these problems. Positivist enquiry has come to occupy an increasingly vexed position within the field of tourism scholarship. Over the past decade, such enquiry has been challenged as the predominant basis of constructing tourism knowledge, with critical and reflexive discourses instead leading the current debate (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard 2007; Bianchi 2009; Bramwell & Lane 2014; Hollinshead 2006; Ren, Pritchard & Morgan 2010; Wilson & Hollinshead 2015). In light of this epistemological shift, this study has used the neo-tribal approach to improve understanding of gay travellers as ephemeral, and as sentiment- and ritual-oriented travellers.

The present body of scholarly enquiry into gay travellers, their behaviours and their motivations tends towards homogenisation: it reflects a limited imagining of LGBT people as a diverse and mutable grouping, seeking out myriad spaces for myriad purposes. This monolithic idea of gay travellers should be resisted as it arguably requires a silencing of some voices and the privileging of others. The validity of a singular gay traveller profile has not gone unchallenged in the literature – for instance, documenting of lesbians (Hughes 2006a; Therkelsen et al. 2013), older gay men (Hughes & Deutsch 2010) and rainbow families (Hughes & Southall 2012; Lucena, Jarvis & Weeden 2015) – but this is not representative of the bulk of research into gay travellers and, particularly, their engagement with gay spaces.

This paper asserts that the inadequate sensitivity of the extant literature emerges from a failure to appreciate gay spaces as varied and particular, defined as much by exclusion as perceived inclusiveness for all LGBT people. The neglect of space's function in governing and delimiting the behaviour of gay travellers directly enacts the homogenisation of the type within scholarly literature. Instead, this paper seeks to demonstrate the instrumental role space plays as the point of coherence for a particular group of gay travellers – a neo-tribe. Neo-tribal theory characterises space as an anchoring point towards which members with shared sentiment, rituals and symbols are drawn (Cova & Cova 2002; Hughson 1999; Maffesoli 1996). Inquiry into specific and situated gay travel spaces – such as the gay resort where this ethnographic research was conducted – is essential to counteract the homogenisation evident in much research into gay travel.

The LGBT label references a loosely allied group of people, united in their marginal social positioning and political need, and the presumption that such people could be coherently

characterised as a single grouping of travel consumers demands interrogation. Single gay men and lesbians, gay families, trans-people, among others – it can be readily perceived that many under the LGBT banner may be less amenable to the social and sexual mores attributed to 'gay' space than those of the ever-implicit straight, cis person. Yet the absence of straight society and values is the only reference against which this imagining of gay space is organised.

Although the majority of research into the subject has been conducted in gay tourism destinations (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016), it has focused on the motivations and behaviours of travellers, but not the organising and segregating function of space per se. The unspoken assumption in much of the literature is that gay spaces are more inclusive than their counterparts in wider society, and that the experience of this inclusiveness can be generalised across the entire spectrum of LGBT people. It is further assumed that these spaces' seclusion enable the specific motivations, mores and desires of travellers who seek such. What if, instead, gay spaces organise around and perform a specific set of values and travel motivations? And if, rather than the imagined diversity of such spaces as opposed to the hegemonic constraints of heterosexual society, gay space serves to concentrate people with increasingly convergent desires and motivations? This makes plain the hazards inherent to the spatial insensitivity of existing research into gay travel: by neglecting the way in which space organises and enables the habits and mores of the neo-tribe, such research has amplified some voices which silencing others. This research seeks to interrogate space itself, by foregrounding its specificity and integral role in collecting travellers with common values, desires and aspirations.

Literature review

Conceptualising neo-tribes

As highlighted above, this paper suggests that the motivations and, particularly, social behaviours of gay travellers can be conceptualised within the framework of neo-tribes. Its analysis further capitalises upon the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory, as a means for people from disparate walks of life to become united. The notion of neo-tribalism was first introduced in the late 1980's by the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli. The theoretical framework of neo-tribes was enriched by a number of researchers and authors, most notably by the sociologist Andy Bennett (see Bennett 1999, 2002, 2005). In the mid-1990's, neo-tribal theory consolidated its position as an alternative to the theory of subculture. This emergent theory primarily found application in sociology (see Bennett 1999; Hughson 1999; Robards & Bennett 2011). Its sociological applications saw the theory adopted by the field of marketing (see Cooper, McLoughlin & Keating 2005; Cova & Cova 2002; Wang 2005), and, more recently, in tourism and leisure studies (see Goulding & Shankar 2011; Hardy, Hanson & Gretzel 2012; Hardy & Robards 2015; Weaver 2011).

A neo-tribe is essentially defined as a network of heterogeneous individuals – with regard to age, income, sex, sexual orientation etc. Individuals hailing from disparate walks of life are brought together through a 'linking value' determined through a shared passion or emotion. Therefore, neo-tribes may be organised around ephemeral identities, which may be lucrative commodities, brands and services (Cova & Cova 2002; e Silva & dos Santos 2012). Neo-tribal theory's suggestion of structural fluidity, reflexivity, and foremost of individuality has stood in stark juxtaposition with the deterministic centrality of identity, and the class-based stratification asserted by subcultural theory (Bennett 1999).

Essentially, the concept of a neo-tribe could be characterised as possessing the following four aspects: shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, fluidity in membership, and space (Vorobjovas-Pinta 2017). Shared sentiment reflects the common desire to seek out others with shared interests, sensibilities and passions. Such pursuit is theorised to form and distort patterns of consumption (Aubert-Gamet & Cova 1999; Cova & Cova 2002). Neo-tribal groupings propelled by these shared sentiments hold particular and situated rituals and symbols in common; this affirmative signage emphasises exclusive and intimate belonging. While rituals and symbols establish belonging, the fluidity of tribal membership is reflected through the differing walks of life from which individuals come to form a group for a shared purpose. While neo-tribes are demarcated by such rituals and symbols, by the shared sentiments they suggest, and the spaces their memberships inhabit, the tribes themselves remain fluid and mutable aggregations of people. These demarcations are as such located in both temporal and spatial dimensions (Hardy & Robards 2015).

While fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, and tribal rituals and symbols have been addressed extensively in the literature (Hardy & Robards 2015; Vorobjovas-Pinta 2017), there is a relative paucity of research into the spatial characteristic underpinning neo-tribal theory. This is particularly evident in the absence of inquiry into the role of space as the point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. The relevance of space has been anecdotally acknowledged by several scholars; however, space is taken as peripheral to the arguments presented, without further inquiry into the instrumental role of space beyond a literal place of gathering. Space becomes a canvas and conduit for cultural and social values of the tribe, while in turn, its physical delineations and specificity shapes and alters the values of its occupants (Malpas 2012). For example, Hughson (1999) asserts that neo-tribal emergence relies upon the collective human colonisation of a particular space. Hughson

(1999, p. 14) further observes that 'an awareness of the social and cultural geography of relevant spaces is […] crucial to the study of neo-tribes.' Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) argue in a similar vein that spaces are 'anchoring places' which serve as situated shelters for the tribe. These statements reflect the authors' interpretations of Maffesoli's seminal work, but do not rest their theoretical expansions upon empirical observation or inquiry. This research aims to bridge this gap.

Neo-tribal theory presents an opportunity to explore the social aspects of travel. This research aims to explore whether neo-tribalism better comprehends gay travellers, particularly in terms of their behaviour and experiences. The role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form is of particular concern, and presents particular opportunity to expand upon the theoretical framework of neo-tribalism. This is especially germane to the extant body of gay travel research, which has consistently acknowledged the critical importance of gay space to the gay community. Neo-tribal theory is a perceptive and novel tool for the exploration of how gay travellers make their decisions about travel, how they communicate with each other through their journeys, and how they use gay space in the performance of their identities.

Gay travel and the relevance of space

Travel is a symbolic and germane reflection of modern gay culture. Academic inquiry into gay travel is a much more recent phenomenon than might be first assumed: the seminal literature which came to define and shape understanding of gay travel emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s. Despite the universality of homosexuality, it should be noted that much of the studies pertaining to gay tourism carry with them Western values: in the

authorship of the studies, in the places surveyed and gay travellers themselves. The literature has structured gay travel behaviour into three motivational clusters: identity expression and exploration (e.g. Browne & Bakshi 2011; Hughes 1997), sense of community and fellowship (e.g. Hindle 1994; Pritchard et al. 2000), and sexual candour (e.g. Clift & Forrest 1999; Clift & Wilkins 1995; Mendoza 2013). Gay travel is often presented as an idealised escape from the heteronormative strictures of everyday life, and an opportunity to embrace and express one's identity. The spectre of homophobic bullying and abuse, real or imagined, still often limits same-sex affection to coded and furtive expression in general society. These sentiments of escapism led to the establishment of gay spaces, ranging from gay bars and villages in urban environments, to the fuller realisation of a homosexual sociality in the form of exclusively gay travel resorts and destinations. This phenomenon even extends to gay townships and communities, such as Cherry Grove and Fire Island Pines, on New York's Fire Island. Early literature emphasised gay space as primary motivator surrounding the concept of gay travel; it provided a platform for like-minded gay men to find community and express themselves in safe environs. In light of increased acceptance of sexual and gender diversity, more recent literature offers insufficient insight into the ongoing motivations of people who seek out such spaces.

Scholars examining gay leisure and travel have emphasised the intertwined nature of one's sexuality and the space in which it is performed (Binnie & Valentine 1999; Hughes 2006b; Waitt & Markwell 2006). Space becomes a vessel for the ideologies, need, practices, and desires of those occupying it, and through this relationship the sexual, racial, and gender categories of its inhabitants become refracted in its imperceptible boundaries (Sonnekus 2013). Likewise, Maliepaard (2015, p. 149) argues that 'sexual identity negotiations influence the sexual coding of space.' In a similar manner, Smuts (2011) emphasises the

centrality of ‘social space’, as particular spaces carry values permitting sexual identities to flourish, or to be subverted, at particular points in time. In societies where heterosexuality is the prevailing norm, marginal spaces within which minorities recast themselves as local, ephemeral majorities become an essential conduit of collective social imagination. In these social spaces, be they bars, clubs, or resorts, alternative norms can be realised through mutual assent. These norms may not be the same to all those inhabiting the space, in that ‘gay space qualifies as a leisure space that may play different roles to different gay people’ (Blichfeldt, Chor & Milan 2013, p. 473). This recognises that the gay population is diverse and fluid. Gay people might not only hold dissimilar relationships to spaces, but also might not want to associate with a given gay space at all. The essential hybridity of gay culture challenges any ethnographic discourse that might want to derive general 'truths': gay people, united only in their sexual orientation and alienation to heterosexual expectations, carry with them all the world's diversity in cultures and histories, and with that, diverse and additional racialised and gendered exclusions (Waitt, Markwell & Gorman-Murray 2008). It is imperative therefore to resist any gesture towards the homogenised portrayal of LGBT people, in academic inquiry or other cultural spheres; it likewise must be emphasised that LBGT communities, and LGBT-only spaces, are not exempt from internal power relations and the tyranny of social and political hierarchies (Browne & Bakshi 2011).

Given that some gay travellers seek spaces, which impart permission for them to express themselves and to be understood, there is an opportunity for commercialisation of these needs. Vorobjovas-Pinta and Hardy (2016, p. 416) argue that ‘gay space […] creates a particular pattern of consumption and needs, including travelling.’ Commercial opportunity implicit in this has been seized upon by tourism operators, who have used and produced gay or gay-friendly spaces. For example, gay-friendly cruise ships present and brand themselves

as safe and bounded spaces (Weeden, Lester & Jarvis 2016). This exemplifies how through selling the intangible product of safety, space becomes a commodity, which therefore can be manipulated for different needs and for different groups or gay travellers. Current gay leisure and travel literature delves into the sociological and geographical complexities of gay space by deconstructing how space reflects identity through its division and occupation, but does not consider the how the properties of spaces themselves shape social structures and connections between people. Gay space is not a simple substrate bereft of its own culture and symbols. Rather than just being a generic environs where like-minded people coalesce, 'gay space' is the product of a symbolic investment which transforms how a particular space is viewed over an extended period of time, and in turn, shapes the people who then come to occupy it (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016).

Just as the lives of gay people have been marked by the rapid expansion of their legal rights and societal acceptance, and too by technological revolution and the advent of the internet, the contours and contexts of gay travel have been marked by change (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). Despite social and technological upheaval, the concept of gay travel itself remains resilient. At its core, gay travel might be regarded as the transient occupation of a space by travellers with common demographic characteristics, motivations and behaviours. This occupation is oriented towards the fulfilment of needs and desires shared with fellow travellers, be this belonging, community and kinship, the forging of sexual and romantic connections, and the like. Gay travellers as such represent a group to which neo-tribal theory can be readily applied.

Method

Critical ethnography

This research was built upon a critical ethnographic investigation into gay resort visitors and their behaviour as a neo-tribe. Using an exploratory method, the study aimed to identify how space shapes and enacts the behaviour of this neo-tribe. Space was taken as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form, and so all enquiry into their characteristics had to be performed in reference to this. Enquiry into neo-tribal behaviour, its formation, and its self-expression requires care and sensitivity; this indeed presented the challenge of selecting an appropriate qualitative approach (Greenacre, Freeman & Donald 2013). Ethnography carried with it that care: through proximity to its subjects, ethnography is the 'sensitive register' which records culture, as it both reflects and generates social complexity and change (Willis & Trondman 2000, p. 399). Critical ethnography was further considered to be compatible with neo-tribal theory, as it reflects the complexities entrenched within sociology of tourism. Ethnography carries these same multifaceted sentiments, and this approach to tourism uncovered values at the very core of neo-tribalism. Closeness of interaction with subjects underpins the integrity of knowledge gained from critical ethnography, and the intimate quality of those social and cultural insights themselves (Sørensen, 2003). This methodology involved extensive researcher embeddedness in a gay tourism environment. Critical ethnography has emphasised the importance of embeddedness, and this was considered essential in this study to accommodate the inescapable constraints and complexities of studying gay everyday lives. Critical ethnography extends rather than opposes conventional modes of ethnography: it shifts focus onto the social and cultural constructs that generate and are generated by racial,

social, and sexual inequalities, as well as ideologies of oppression (Anderson 1989; Chang 2005).

Situating the research

The fieldwork underpinning this research was conducted in an exclusively gay and lesbian resort in Far North Queensland, Australia, over six weeks during September and October 2014. Ethnography has been generally imagined as an extended process of research; due to the strict time limitations dictated by the seasonality at the resort, and the ephemeral and fluid nature of the population concerned, intensive short-term ethnography was considered apposite. For populations difficult to reflect upon with conventional methodologies, short-term ethnography accesses 'particular temporal and spatial characteristics as well as specific qualities' through 'intensive excursion' into the lives of people (Pink & Morgan 2013, p. 359). Short-term ethnography prompts the researcher to become immersed in the knowledge produced by the enquiry, inducing a resonance with what the research aims to investigate.

Australia's only gay and lesbian resort is located within tropical rainforest in Far North Queensland. Its environment is one of relative seclusion, with the closest township being five kilometres away. The resort markets itself as an entirely private accommodation provider, where clothing is optional. The resort has thirty rooms accommodating eighty to one-hundred guests at full capacity. Amenities include an outdoor swimming pool, an outdoor spa (the 'hot tub'), a bar, dining area and gym. In the period of the fieldwork, the average duration of guests' stay at the resort was three to four nights, the minimum being one night and the maximum eleven nights. The majority of guests were from Australia,

however there was also a large contingent of patrons from New Zealand, the USA, the UK, and from continental Europe.

The author stayed at the resort in order to conduct the research. These lodgings were provided free of charge, in exchange for unremunerated work at the resort. The author's assignments included manning the front desk, work as kitchen-hand, in addition to guidance with marketing strategies for the promotion of the resort on social media and the internet. The employment elements of the fieldwork offered multiple angles of engagement, not only with resort visitors, but also with colleagues and superiors; this breadth of process translated into richer and more diverse data. This dualistic self-concept–researcher and worker–did not compromise process, as some methodological approaches might hold, but rather contributed to the greater realisation of researcher embeddedness. Sørensen (2003) similarly experienced that presence in a 'double role' – researcher and backpacker in his case – was beneficial to his research: the dialogue between participant and researcher was reflexive, and this produced valuable and unanticipated data, often emerging outside and beyond the framework that had been set for the interview.

The data were gathered through observation of patrons' behaviour in public spaces at the resort, and through in-depth semi-structured interviews followed by the collection of demographic information. Although the resort promotes itself as a both gay and lesbian resort, the place was dominated by a male clientele. The data collected reflected this imbalance, as interviews were only conducted with male patrons. It should be emphasised that this was not a feature of the study design, but was rather emergent from the extremely skewed gender composition of the resort visitors in the period of the study. The fieldwork resulted in 23 formal interviews with 26 self-identifying gay men. Twenty of the

respondents were interviewed individually, and six respondents were interviewed as three couples, at the request of these participants. Two of these couples were romantic partners, while the last pair visited the resort as friends. The interviews lasted between sixteen minutes and one hour and ten minutes. The interviews were recorded digitally, and later transcribed for thematic analysis using NVivo software. Participants came from different walks of life, and represented a diverse array of socio-economic backgrounds. Interviewees were aged between 27 and 63, though one man declined to disclose his age. Half of those interviewed were solo travellers, whereas the remainder visited the resort accompanied by a partner or friends. While ten of the participants were 'first-timers', a notable majority of sixteen had visited the resort at least once before.

In compliance with the *Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (Australian Government 2007), the research was conducted with full disclosure, and the presence and role of the researcher made clear. This was adhered to through all instances of formal interviews, and during observation: the author informed visitors verbally and in writing, by way of posters and leaflets distributed around the resort, of his presence on-site. The transcripts, and the interviews and conversations which they record, form the 'tangible substance of the fieldwork' (Sørensen 2003). The many informal conversations between the author and the resort visitors were not excluded from the body of knowledge generated, but rather, were considered an opportunity for extended insights to emerge. These informal conversations were considered an equal part of the observational data collected. Further observations were gathered and manually recorded with memos and field notes. The field notes were condensed descriptions of patrons' behaviour at various public locations around the resort, of their interactions with the author,

staff and fellow guests, and of–with particular attention given here–how space governed and mediated these habits and occurrences.

The principle purpose of this ethnography is the application of neo-tribal theory to a novel tourism environment, and the specific exploration of the theory's spatial implications. As this is the foremost concern of this study, analysis of transcripts and field notes proceeded through a thematic coding, corresponding to components of the theory being applied: fluidity in membership; shared sentiment; rituals and symbols; and space.

Findings and discussion

Fluidity in membership

Neo-tribal membership has been described as fluid and ephemeral in its nature (Bennett 1999; Hardy & Robards 2015). It is predicated upon a state-of-mind and a lifestyle rather than an abiding engagement. Members of a neo-tribe form, dissolve and reform alongside fluctuating consumer values. Otnes and Maclaran (2007, p. 52) describe the state of membership as 'loosely connected, inherently unstable, and held together essentially through emotion and passion.' It may follow that the very definition of fluidity in membership is understood through arrival and departure, or connection and disconnection, from the neo-tribal realities. Nathan[6] describes departure from the resort as follows:

> Back to our normal life. This is not a normal life for us. This is vacation. Vacation does not mean that I act necessarily whole a lot different. But I might be taking opportunities on

[6] All of the names used in this paper are aliases to protect the confidentiality of participants.

> vacation that I wouldn't normally. But back to the norm means normal, everyday, routine. That's not necessarily back to a particular way of behaving.

Ephemeral membership of the tribe then contains both continuity of the self and broadened horizons and shifted norms. The majority of the resort visitors expressed a sense of kinship, empathy and compassion to one another. Despite coming from different walks of life, the resilient feeling of community among the resort visitors emerges from the shared essence of being gay. This encompasses the common experience of societal vulnerability and 'coming-out', a willingness to segregate from the heteronormative day-to-day life, and potential sexual experiences. As such, this spontaneous and unstructured desire to be with like-minded others not only demonstrates a degree of *communitas* (a la Victor Turner) within the gay resort community, but also reflects the notion that neo-tribes are inherently ephemeral: they exist so long as there is enough drive, or *puissance*. For example, Dean expresses this somewhat existential need to belong, and alludes to the qualities of the bonding process:

> I really want to, and it's important for me to meet people, chat with people, and get to know them. I am travelling solo; at gay places particularly it is much easier to meet people, because we are already having a connection even before the moment you walk through the door. […] We are all gay. So right when you walk through the door, you already know that everybody sitting around you is same type of person – gay.

Dean's idea of spatial segregation enabling immediacy in connection between this emergent gay community is echoed by Geoff, who relates the intrinsic 'membership' held by gay people to the gay resort. He states:

> […] at this place, I think, because you are gay, there is some sort of a membership or a club feeling and that you are automatically sort of allowed to talk to people earlier than you would in a normal – straight place.

While considered inherent or automatic, the contours of this membership are as particular as the spaces which enable them, and are therefore as transient as the resort space is itself to its clientele. As such, neo-tribalism extends beyond the realm of the interpersonal, and might too encompass affective relationships to specific locations or spaces, namely the gay resort. These interlocking bonds are marked by their essential transience, and extend the notion of fluidity in membership beyond relationships between people, to those between people and space; the complexity of the relationships with other visitors is foremost enabled by the imminence with which these connections will disintegrate again, and it is from this paradoxical intimacy that the affective bond with this space is forged.

Shared sentiment

Neo-tribes are traditionally portrayed by gatherings of people who are united through their shared sentiment and values (Cova & Cova 2002). Bennett (1999) postulates that shared sentiment may be expressed through shared aspiration for a particular 'lifestyle'. The explicitly commercial basis of shared sentiment can be identified in Chaney (1996). The author distinguishes 'lifestyles' from ways of life, with the former representing the continual project of identity construction and reification through consumer decisions; that is, the accretion of identity through purchasing. Ways of life are by contrast more sociological: they extend to social linkages, cultural practices, shared language and dialect. The shared sentiment concept is extended in e Silva and dos Santos (2012), who define it as a 'linking

value' that bonds similar experiences and emotions together, and transmutes these commonalities into identity. This research suggests that neo-tribal shared sentiment converges on a common feeling of self-actualisation, shared experiences, and collective attachment to place and mutually held norms and values.

Self-actualisation was evident in conversations about sexuality and identity. Common sexuality carries with it a tacit knowledge and a redefinition of difference, which alters mores around the forming of social connections. The embrace of difference within a space of common identity may not imply any contradiction, nor are these forces countervailing as such. The function of the resort as a neo-tribal point of assembly may be to enable people to freely express their differences, and their plural identities, as their belonging within the space has common recognition and does not need to be established further. Neo-tribes centred around sexualities and genders may be a particularly stark example of this phenomenon, as homosexuality is popularly understood as an immutable and intrinsic facet of one's character. Neo-tribalism has been represented as a revival of values rooted in community identification and syncretism (Cova & Cova 2002; e Silva & dos Santos 2012): the mechanics of neo-tribal sociality are not rooted in the particulars of shared cultural experience, but in a repudiation of the apparent atomisation and anomie of postmodern society-at-large. This is evident in Campbell's celebration of difference and commonality in the same breath, without apparent contradiction:

> […] people that are around here […] are not all the Muscle Marys, the Body Beautifuls, the people that spend hours prettying to then show off here. You got people here in all shapes and sizes, different nationalities, and because of that, it's like a soup. It makes everyone feel comfortable.

Sexuality also becomes intertwined with shared sentiment as shared experiences. Gay resort visitors discussed and shared issues including the processes and effects of their 'coming-out', and (first) sexual encounters with same-sex partners. Geoff observes:

> You can talk about your coming out experiences. Gay people are kind of often frank and open about their lives and their stories. It's really nice hearing that stuff; it helps your own journey

Sexuality does not here only operate along axes of desire and physical intimacy, but a community and culture engendered by shared history and collective effervescence. Shared sentiment is then too the safety of being understood, the opportunity for mutual support, and the reassurance that through the life-courses of gay men there run common threads and stories. This spontaneous and emergent feeling of belonging, togetherness and unity signifies not only a departure from individualistic sensibilities; it is further a gesture towards the unconscious and collective manifestation of desires, histories and sentiments.

In addition to common histories and shared experiences of gay resort visitors, it is clear that the neo-tribal ambience of the gay resort, and the journeying itself to the resort space, manifests as permission to renegotiate the boundaries and mores of wider society. The third distinct facet of shared sentiment was apparent through visitors' emotional attachment to the resort, and from their eagerness to preserve its integrity as an exclusively gay venue. This appeared necessary for the resort to continue to attract the same clientele, and to maintain its ambience. Tourists whom I interviewed indicated that they placed great value on unique aspects of the liberties that the resort allowed. For example, the ability to walk around the resort naked, and as a result they felt great emotional attachment to the business. Guests also related memories of previous stays at the resort. Sam and Charlie both

articulate their affective relationship with the resort in commercial terms, acknowledging the exclusivity of the space is predicated on supply and demand, and that the viability of individual escape rests on the community's funding the resort:

> Sam: […] other gay people come here to support the resort itself in order to keep the resort for the gay community. […] I've heard before someone saying 'oh let's come here as often so we would have the resort and it would be still here for us', like financially. The more the guests the more the resort would be viable.
>
> Charlie: I think that would be a real shame [if the resort was closed], because there are so few places that are catered for gay tourists so directly. Heterosexual places are everywhere; I don't think that would be fair. […] there is also a big change happening in society, […], younger straight people are much more accepting of gay people now. So perhaps the resort like this won't have to exist in fifty years. I don't think we are quite there yet though.

The transactional nature of this deeply affective space does not appear incongruent to the resort's clientele. Through this interdependence, the twin shared sentiments of sexuality and exclusivity at the resort are intertwined. It might be pertinent to ask then which of these sentiments precedes the other, and in that manner, whether the consumer 'lifestyle' embodied by the resort stands in service of the particular gay male ways of life, or whether these ways of life might be generated by the commercial report space itself.

Rituals and symbols

For Maffesoli (1996, p. 82), rituals and symbols form a 'religious model' of meaning, which is a 'useful way of understanding social ties.' These social ties are mediated and strengthened through rituals and symbols, which serve to elevate the powerless individual into an

empowered and effective collective. By their intrinsic nature, these are designed through common effort in what Maffesoli (1996) describes as 'freemasonry', a term which carries with it substantial symbolic weight. He further suggests ritual reasserts and reinforces the wholeness of the tribe to itself, by verifying the tribe's self-imaginary. This is confirmed by Goulding and Shankar (2011), who observes pseudo-religious rituals and sacralisation of time in clubbing culture. Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013) allude to rituals and symbols as behavioural characteristics, where a shared tribe-specific language (jargon) is used amongst the RVing neo-tribe. For Weaver (2011) rituals and symbols are given weight by their nostalgic value, their collective associations and shared histories gesturing towards the 'good old days'.

The aspects of shared rituals and symbols at the gay resort emerged through the distinctive lexicon of the resort's patrons, blending terminology and euphemism unique to the resort with the wider vernacular of gay male culture. The esoteric resort 'dialect' is demonstrated by Toby and Gerry below:

> Toby: Channel 1 is a winner.
>
> Gerry: Channel 1 – I have seen it a few times but not as much as last year because that was just a novelty […].

The term 'Channel 1' would probably bear no meaning to an outsider without further explanation. However, this term is coded within the minds and experience of the resort visitors, and becomes elemental for interaction between the members of the resort tribe. This transcends mere euphemism: Channel 1 is indeed the first channel on the television in visitors' rooms, yet this plainly carries a wider and universally-understood set of implications. Those comments without truncation are recorded below:

> Toby: Channel 1 is a winner. A bit of porn is always good.
>
> Gerry: Channel 1 – I have seen it a few times but not as much as last year because that was just a novelty to see porn running 24/7.

The aspects of shared rituals and symbols further manifested as the rules governing the space – or, rather, the absence thereof –, and daily routines, which were most distinct in their deviations from everyday norms, such as open nudity. The resort advertises itself as a clothing optional resort, though there is no pressure to go unclad. The comments below demonstrate patrons' approach to nudity at the resort:

> Campbell: […] the ability to go onto the beach, take off your clothes, not worry about offending anybody else [means a lot].
>
> Toby: It's inclusive and easy; you can nude up on a beach. I am not a nudist in my real life at all but here I do.
>
> Sam: Coming here the first time, we didn't realise there was a nude beach. […]. This was kind of exciting because it was testing our limits and we were challenging ourselves also. […] I was challenging myself to do something that I haven't done before. It is kind of, first time experience. It was something that excited me.
>
> Zack: I don't mind. I don't get nude but I don't care if other people do it. I am just fine. It's good. I just don't feel doing it.

The normalcy with which open nudity was regarded suggests the neo-tribe of the resort posits a radical societal alternative, through its abrogation of everyday expectation and norms such as clothing so universally accepted – yet strictly enforced – as to be all but invisible. The examples above demonstrate different approaches to nudity, the extremes being a primary motivator to come to the resort; and the other being not so inclined at all.

The overarching idea that needs to be noted is that open nudity falls within the norms of the resort, and is universally accepted even if not universally embraced.

Togetherness and socialising was encouraged by the resort through adapting or appropriating familial rituals such as communal dining, held at the 'Lizard' table[7]. The table was a social catalyst, introducing new visitors to one another, sparking connections and deepening relationships through sharing stories and experiences, all enabled by the symbolically rich context of shared dining. Toby and Alexander, for example, reflect:

> Toby: I usually meet people at the Lizard table at the dinner. It's when I talk to the people because I don't talk to the people much during the day.
>
> Alexander: […] the Lizard table is quite a good concept that […] before I arrived here I would've thought that I would hate. But it actually worked out.

In relating these particular examples, it should be noted that they become ritualised as part of a daily schedule shared by the majority of resort patrons, such as dinner at the communal 'Lizard' table followed by skinny dipping into the hot-tub. The latter often evolved into sexual experiences, which, for some, became part of this ritual. Charlie observes:

> The hot tub after dinner is nice as a further relaxation after dinner, before you go to bed. It's a place for people to chat after dinner. Dinner is not very formal, but hot tub is even less formal. People are naked again, and they seem to talk more honestly in that environment.

The examples presented in this section resonate with Goulding and Shankar (2011), who assert that members of a neo-tribe are compelled to assimilate tribe-specific codes, rituals and rules of engagement. This could be elaborated further in that these rituals and symbols are not only community-specific (sans space), i.e. co-created by the members of a tribe and

[7] The name of the table has been changed to avoid making reference to the name of the resort.

passed on in a chain-like system from one visitor to another, but also place-specific – created by the resort management and imposed onto patrons. Furthermore, it could be argued that resort-community-created rituals and symbols do not have any value outside the resort. This would suggest that community-created rituals are absorbed and institutionalised by the resort – a confined space. Previous research has tended to describe rituals and symbols as phenomena arising endogenously from the members of the tribe; this study has shown how certain rituals and symbols might instead be created by the management of the resort. This implies that there is potential for the manipulation and alteration of the existing rules of engagement to suit commercial imperatives. This echoes Cova and Cova (2002, p. 600), who note 'consumers seek products and services less for their use than for their linking value,' but subverts their unspoken assumption that this process is consumer-led: perhaps businesses have begun not to package and sell products foremost, but belonging. It is imperative to query assumptions about the neo-tribe, as it is clear that tribes defined by product-generated rituals are sometimes indistinguishable from those which use existing products in the service of self-definition.

Space

Hetherington (1998) describes space as a 'performance site', where the collective neo-tribal identity is openly manifested. Similarly, Hughson (1999) uses the term 'social centrality' to denote the significance of the collective gathering. This significance is further enhanced by Cova & Cova (2002, p. 605) who explain that neo-tribes 'gather and perform its rituals in public places, assembly halls, meeting-places, places of worship or commemoration.' The theorisation of space within the neo-tribal framework carries with it the sentiment that

space is only an empty container or a vacuum, where the members from different walks of life are united through pre-existing shared sentiment, and perform pre-existing rituals. This can be observed in Goulding and Shankar (2011), who concentrate upon ritualised clubbing behaviour and affiliation with clubbing culture, but do not consider how club spaces themselves promulgate rituals; or in Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013), who explore spectra of fluidity in membership, and the variable RVing culture which arises in disparate camping locations, but who do not consider how locations form and perpetuate these variations. Extending the sentiment that neo-tribes can be formed around consumption and brands (Cova & Cova 2002; e Silva & dos Santos 2012; Maffesoli 1996), this research revealed that space itself becomes a commodity around which neo-tribes coalesce.

Like brands, services and high-value commodities, the gay resort offers certain associated features, facilities and expectations. This does not necessarily suggest that these amenities are what the resort represents to its guests, and this suggests the distinctive nature of the resort as a tourism product, and the intricate interleaving of neo-tribal spatial imaginary and the physical resort space itself. The spatial exclusivity, even ownership, of this community or neo-tribe seems to be the exact product that is being packaged and sold. Sam and Graham illustrate:

> Sam: Other resorts might have better facilities, other resorts might have better location, but because this is a specialised resort for the gay community it makes it special.
>
> Graham: It makes us [gay community] feel fortunate that we can have our own environment. [This is] not to segregate ourselves from the community but [this is] an opportunity to escape from that.

The centrality of spatial exclusivity suggests neo-tribalism as it develops between tourists at the resort becomes the principle tourism product. Desire for freedom and for safety are inextricable for gay people, due to histories of oppression, and as such gay travel spatiality demands a re-evaluation of tourism orthodoxy. Holidaying at the gay resort is not only about leisure, or relaxation; it becomes escape to a place free from hegemonic strictures, real and imagined. And through freedom from such structures, the resort exists perhaps foremost as an imaginary, becoming more the promise of sociality to which gays are not perpetually peripheral than anything physical. This is further voiced by Dominic and Phil:

> Dominic: Other resorts are very family directed. Even Palm Cove, which we like, is very family based […]. It would be a great place for my children and grandchildren to go and have a very lovely beach experience. But I think we would be much more guarded and less relaxed in that sort of venue.
>
> Phil: I am bit fearful of […] non-gay resorts that if I casually looked at someone and smiled at them they might take offense to it. At gay resort, I can smile at someone and if they are not interested, they just might smile back and not take any offense. I kind of take it as a compliment.

The resort space liberates true identities, but because these identities cannot be realised in the omnipresence of heteronormativity elsewhere, this liberation is not so different to creation, or recreation, of these identities. This is not to say that all gay people seek to escape heteronormative places, or have an explicitly gay holiday. This claim would be incorrect for all homosexuals, and likewise heterosexuals, whose behaviours cannot be reduced to any monolithic characterisation. This would be to genericise, and would carry with it the old-fashioned stereotyping of early research into gay tourism, who saw gay travellers as rich, well-educated white gay men, who form one stable and homogenous

market (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2016). This research does, however, find that the cultural integrity of the resort space is central to its appeal, and gay exclusivity is the essential precondition of this integrity, in the view of its patrons. The seclusion promised by gay tourism destinations is the promise of community, in notable contrast to what might be assumed that heterosexual consumers might hope to gain from a seaside escape: exclusivity and community are here intertwined. Graham states:

> You treat non-gay establishments as a room, not a place to come and stay and be yourself.

As the above sections on fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, and rituals and symbols emphasise, space is the fulcrum of neo-tribal coalescence, and it is more than just a symbolically-empty stage for neo-tribal performance. The gay resort does not only enable membership by penetrating a shared sentiment around it, but also allows for rituals and symbols to emerge. The ownership, the definition, and the idolisation of space creates an ephemeral narrative, and even an identity – a neo-tribe.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine gay resort visitors' behavioural traits and symbolic idiosyncrasies as observed through the characteristics of a neo-tribal approach – fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, rituals and symbols, and space. Specifically, this paper investigated and focused upon the role of space – a gay resort – as a point of coherence around which this particular neo-tribe forms and flourishes. The emergent themes evidence that the gay resort visitors possess the characteristics of a neo-tribe, and that they may be distinguished by symbolic characteristics: the desire to escape routine life, for self-

expression – the 'real' self – in a non-judgemental environment, and for connection with like-minded people; fluidity in membership; and opportunity to self-actualise enabled by departure from a socially constructed – heterogenic – normality. The gay resort is not a platform for these aforementioned characteristics, but a seedbed, and a catalyst, for the emergence of new rituals, traditions and shared behaviours.

Beyond the immediate contexts of gay tourism, the resort is distinctive as an advanced example of a pre-packaged neo-tribe, where the contours of in-group membership and rituals of belonging have been transformed into a tourism product and sold to a specific audience. The loose similarities, cultural touchstones, and even historical vulnerabilities common to their target market are leveraged to create a fast-forming, fast-dissipating, accessible and ephemeral neo-tribe, and the sensation of belonging becomes what it is truly being sold.

The fleeting state of neo-tribal membership is itself enabling; for the participants in this study, it represents a transient and transitory escape from day-to-day routine, and this escape might not be accessible were it to instead represent permanent change. While this accords with the generally assumed desires of gay travellers, who seek to step outside their everyday lives to enjoy the freedom of alternative norms and opportunities at their destinations, the fullness of what the gay sociality of the resort represents is greater than this. While such freedoms are enabled by the essential transience of travel, so is the chance to feel gay community without the ever-looming threat of heteronormative censure or sanction, or even the violence that still enforces the limits of queer sociality and existence. Neo-tribal accessibility and richness is found in its diversity, and in the resultant abundance of social linkages and inter-social and inter-cultural communication. Spaces are the sites of

performance where collective identities are manifested but are themselves formed by and formative of these identities: spatial delineations align with identity boundaries, and vice versa. It must be noted that space here implies no essential physicality. Spaces which are the fulcrum of identity realisation might be 'real' (e.g. a cruise ship, a camping ground), 'virtual' (e.g. an internet forum, a smartphone app), or even imagined.

This research contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of the processes by which neo-tribes form and dissipate by capitalising upon space as the point of coalescence. Space is a connective thread, as demonstrated by the consistent interplay between space and the theoretical characteristics of fluidity in membership, shared sentiment, and rituals and symbols. As such space becomes an exclusive commodity itself and produces the aforementioned characteristics around itself. This presents an opportunity for tourism operators – custodians of for-purpose commercial spaces – to encourage customer loyalty and repeat business, through the deliberate cultivation of neo-tribal characteristics, enacted through the manipulation of space.

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CHAPTER

8

‘It’s been nice, but we’re going back to our lives’: Neo-tribalism and the role of space in a gay resort

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PART

4

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER

9

Summary and conclusions

Context

Following on from an era of mass tourism, it is easy to imagine the identity and desires of the tourist in a singular and monolithic mode. The tendency of academic tourism studies towards quantitative enquiry has rested comfortably upon many of these assumptions (Andriotis, Agiomirgianakis & Mihiotis 2008; Dolničar 2004; Prayag et al. 2015). The field has historically made only limited effort to explore tourism as a deeply multifaceted and even conflicted phenomenon, and as a substrate and stage for the many identity categories and performances which characterise us as individuals – be this race, gender, class, or sexuality (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard 2007; Hollinshead 2006; Wilson, Harris & Small 2008; Wilson & Hollinshead 2015). As the tourism market itself begins to fracture into increasingly niche and targeted products and consumer categorisations (Novelli 2012; Robinson & Novelli 2005), the limitations of the conventional approach to tourism studies have been thrown into ever starker relief.

The movement towards critical tourism studies repudiates this limited perceptivity, and with it has come a shift in epistemological, ontological, and methodological models, axioms, and assumptions (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard 2007; Caton 2012; Figueroa-Domecq et al. 2015; Ren, Pritchard & Morgan 2010). The aim of this research was to deepen this potential for qualitative, ethnographic enquiry through the application and extension of neo-tribal theory to the field of tourism, and specifically to the emergent and transient culture of a group of gay men congregating at a resort in the far north of Queensland, Australia. As a tourism culture and consumer group, gay men themselves bear a homogenising set of preconceptions on the part of wider society, tourism operators, and academia (Vorobjovas-Pinta & Hardy 2014, 2016); this thesis doubly sought to subvert the

homogenising lens of academic tourism enquiry by demonstrating this strictly-demarcated location and highly-specific clientele is itself a multifarious group, made up of travellers each with divergent needs and desires, motivations, histories, and dreams.

The resort within which the fieldwork took place was marked by a certain boundlessness in time, even as it was placed at such distant spatial remove. This may be in part because gay travel as a phenomenon has a surprisingly long history, and one which belies imaginings of this market as somehow a creation of modern, liberalised attitudes to homosexuality and as the exclusive province of liberated, post-closet, and post-HIV/AIDS gays and lesbians. The space created for and by the gay traveller then interacts with and evokes this long antecedence; for LGBT people, there is an opportunity to define themselves, just as they demarcate these spaces.

Whether with reference to the images of Lesbos of antiquity (see Bravmann 1994), or to records of a mobile upper-middle class of Northern Europeans who, in Victorian times, would journey to warmer climes and the companionship of younger men on Grand Tours (Clift & Wilkins 1995), gay travel must not be understood as a new or novel phenomenon. A certain sense of mobility indeed marks historical records of gays and lesbians, perhaps due to the promise of personal and sexual liberation that travel represented, or rather due to the fragile and fleeting nature of the social and cultural circumstances which allowed LBGT people to express themselves freely. In what might otherwise be regarded as historical anomalies, European cities – especially Weimar Berlin – developed a nascent gay tourism culture and infrastructure in the early 20th century (see Prickett 2011), and these places drew gay and lesbian travellers in the manner that San Francisco, the reunified Berlin, and

gay hamlets and destinations such as Fire Island Pines in New York, Sitges in Catalonia, and Key West in Florida do today.

While gay travel has these precedents and histories, we do of course live in unprecedented times for LBGT people in the modern era. The twelve years between *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 and *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015 saw some regions of the United States thrust from having laws criminalising sodomy to officiating same-sex marriages. The past decades – catalysed by the immense suffering of the HIV/AIDS crisis – have seen the rapid embrace of gay rights across large parts of the globe, though change has been unevenly distributed, and in some regions, even retrograde. This has engendered a new paradigm for gay travel, where more destinations and businesses than ever before are open to LGBT visitors, and an unprecedentedly mobile global middle class creates a tribe of travellers united by their sexualities but carrying with them great diversity of backgrounds and cultures, and the ever more divergent attitudes towards LGBT people of their places of origin. At the same time as positive progress has been made around LGBT rights and visibility, there are many enduring forms of inequality and troubling reversals in some parts of the world such as Russia, South-East Asia, and part of sub-Saharan Africa (as has been discussed in Chapter 4).

I detail this context to emphasise the essential complexities of my project, and indeed the historical weight of any attempt to reflect the lives of people through ethnographic methods and qualitative enquiry. This chapter summarises the aims of the research, and presents the findings of this PhD by publication. Neo-tribalism presents a great opportunity to the field of tourism studies, as a theoretical lens with the sensitivity commensurate to our increasingly complex world and modes of interpersonal relationships and assembly. The thesis has detailed its contributions throughout its chapters, but here in conclusion these are collected

and condensed with reference to the expanded applications of neo-tribal theory to the field. A further discussion of the limitations of this project, and the potential for further research and theoretical applications, is appended.

Research questions: Progress and evaluations

As described, the overall opportunity of this research project was *to increase the explanatory power of the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory, as applied to the field of tourism studies* and explored in this ethnographic mode. As such, my research was guided by the following research question:

What is the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form?

This overarching research question represented the primary area of enquiry, which was then extended through one each thematic and theoretical sub-question to provide guidance in answering the principal and overarching question. These sub-questions were:

What is the continuing significance of gay tourism?

To what extent can neo-tribalism exist independently of the underlying characteristic of space?

The primary research question was the exploration of space as the point of coherence in the formation of neo-tribal affiliations. As such, this project required a specific context for study, and a gay resort was selected with reference to prior research which uncovered space as 'the physical manifestation of gay community' (Hindle 1994, p. 11), which itself uncovers space as an essential aspect of gay tourism and gay tourism business. The direction of my

enquiry was guided by thematic and theoretical sub-questions, pertaining to the continued relevance of gay tourism in the cotemporary moment, and the extent to which neo-tribalism can stand independently of this spatial characteristic. These sub-questions were formulated to themselves respond to the research questions, and to draw fully on the power of the chosen ethnographic environment to apply and extend neo-tribal theory. These questions are intimately concerned with the relationship of a minority group and space, and the particular external manifestation and reification of identity that can occur when gay travellers are allowed this opportunity to define their spaces on their own terms.

To answer the first research sub-question, one should understand that gay space holds a markedly different symbolic value to the travellers of today than generations before them, at least as compared with representations in the existing gay travel literature of the 1980s to early 2000s. The gay travel market is more fragmented than it has been in earlier times in terms of it its composition and motivations; while societies more closed to homosexuality produced a more unitary desire to escape and for self-realisation, and produced a greater need for segregated spaces, the travellers of today display more nuanced and contradictory motivations. These span utopian visions of perpetuating exclusively gay cultures – especially as gentrifying inner cities and the expansion of virtual gay platforms continue to shutter gay clubs and bars – to more prosaic desires for sexual candidness and open nudity, and to deeply rooted desires for community. A greater breadth of people are themselves mobile, and the visible emergence of rainbow families and married couples into the cultural mainstream, the continued market for sex travel, gay travellers who are actively averse to being so pigeonholed, and even same-sex desiring men and women who shun the labels each represent potential markets all unable to easily share tourism spaces. The codes and

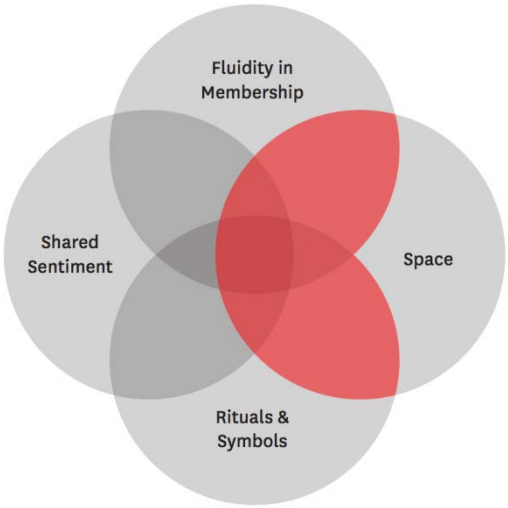
mores of gay tourism spaces become more porous and negotiable, as even the insider-outsider divide of a gay and lesbian-exclusive resort does not itself produce a homogenous consumer grouping. Each traveller is instead free to enact his or her own understanding of gay travel, and the fulfilment of his or her own needs and desires, within this space. This entire community and enterprise is built upon space more marked by its freedom from heteronormative expectations than the effective imposition of any alternative rules or sociality.

To answer the second research sub-question and indeed the overarching research question, a particular neo-tribal setting had to be chosen. The gay resort is an ideal ethnographic milieu for observation of the neo-tribe because this interpersonal model itself recalls the negotiable, transient and mutable rules and symbolic affiliations of the space. Part of the work of this thesis has been to develop a new conceptualisation of neo-tribes and their attendant theoretical aspects. Neo-tribalism has been extended from the seminal work of Michel Maffesoli in *The Time of the Tribes* by sociologists such as Bennett (1999) and researchers in the area of marketing such as Goulding and Shankar (2011), and Cova and Cova (2002), and the work of these theorists in enumerating the characteristics of a neo-tribe has informed the work here. My own contribution has been to divide the tribal unit into four universal characteristics: fluidity in membership; shared sentiment; rituals and symbols; and space. The first three of these are evident in the applications and analyses of the theory in the majority of the literature drawing on the theory – as elaborated in Chapter 2 – but the last of these characteristics had remained conspicuously underdeveloped.

The product of this omission has been an understanding of neo-tribal theory that is disjointed, and which does not articulate what holds these otherwise disparate

characteristics together. This thesis established that space enables membership, and that space is the stage for the performance of the rituals which continually establish tribal belonging or exclusion. The shared sentiment, which serves as the tribal bond, arises out of these symbols, which themselves rest upon the ultimate fundament of space. Figure 2 represents these interlinked characteristics.

Figure 2: Space enables the remaining neo-tribal characteristics



Space precedes these other characteristics, and becomes the fulcrum and linking value for tribal formation. Space also becomes a currency, of a kind, to the neo-tribal unit itself. The possession of space makes the ephemeral neo-tribe coherent, and is both the stage for the performance of shared identity, and the very thing which makes this identity real. To the neo-tribe, which is too mutable in its contours and dynamic in its membership to accrue possessions or property in more legal or literal senses, the figurative tribal territory becomes the shared good which underpins tribal membership. The rituals and symbols of the neo-tribe become a system of gatekeepers, which permit entry, occupation, and shared ownership of space.

By answering the set of research questions, this work demonstrates the explanatory power of space within the broader framework of neo-tribalism, especially as it is applied to tourism. The work demonstrates that space is culturally-imbued but not culturally-constituted; space helps members to connect and share their values, but spaces also impose a set of boundaries and characteristics on neo-tribes, as discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. Neo-tribal relationships and affiliations are ephemeral, and do not persist beyond their immediate and fixed spatial context. This ethnographic study of a gay resort demonstrated how space, distance, seclusion, and a paradigm of ownership enabled a group of gay men to construct alternative socialities. LGBT people do not often set the rules and norms in the spaces they inhabit, as minority people – further, urban gay enclaves such as bars and clubs are narrowed in their purpose, and in their utopian potential. The resort is an opportunity for broader imagining and renegotiation, and this is the direct result of its spatial difference. In demonstrating this, the work has increased the explanatory power of space within neo-tribalism.

Implications of the research

This project has developed a nuanced and sensitive understanding of neo-tribal dynamics, the relationships formed within, and especially how tribal reality is formed upon the underlying substrate of space. This suggests both potential and constriction within their social landscape, and enables neo-tribes of disparate peoples to establish communities of locality and commonality in a highly dynamic and diverse world. To the tourism industry, there is a great imperative to shift away from blunt demographic analyses built upon the ultimate understanding of consumers as individual actors, and towards this framework of

social interconnections, mutual influences, and affective meaning. In the words of e Silva and dos Santos (2012, p. 433), tourism operators 'need to move from talking to consumers, to talking through consumers.'

As the researcher, I submit that the advancement of neo-tribal theory developed in these pages, and the intimate insight into the culture which developed around this one gay resort, might be of significant value to tourism operators and to the tourism and leisure researchers. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the market for tourism is becoming increasingly fragmented, and the pace of these changes appears to be only increasing. This leaves tourism operators with an urgent need to understand their present and potential consumer base, and their desires and attachment to the spaces they manage. My research establishes that Maffesoli's (1996) neo-tribalism, and the distillation of his work here developed, can be a tool which empowers operators to manipulate space itself to attract disparate people, who then use the space as the fulcrum of their collective identity formation. This has clear salience and application to businesses who seek to cultivate a customer base, and who want to amplify the return on their marketing efforts through social media and word-of-mouth; that is, operators who want to tap into to the social lives of their patrons to win access to new customers and markets who may have been invisible and inaccessible by conventional means.

Tourism is 'the optimum example of the application of the co-creation process' (Goulding & Shankar 2011, p. 1451). Operators who are sensitive to the potential of the neo-tribal framework will realise that the experiences and products they offer can become integral to the identities of their niche consumer groupings, as understood as neo-tribes; but they must also in turn realise that the holistic experience is a collaborative process, and that the

affective ownership of their spaces is something shared or even relinquished to the tribal entity. Operators must know what to provide, but also must know when to step back and to allow the endogenous rules and rituals of the tribe, and the emergent symbolism and sentiment its members adopt, to become the new gatekeepers of their space. The paradigm for the tourism operator must be to cultivate tribal realities, or even withdraw at benevolent remove; to impose a culture on their space will be to suffocate nascent neo-tribes, and to forgo the commercial benefits of sentimental attachment and loyalty that members might have provided in return.

Researchers in the field of tourism and leisure studies have no lessened risk of becoming insensitive observers if they do not pay attention to the shift towards critical epistemologies. Like the tourism operator, the researcher who does not heed the productive potential of co-creation, of dynamic and emergent socialities, and of the function of space in catalysing social connection will capture an ever-smaller portion of the experience of niche tourists. Neo-tribalism offers a powerful framework for understanding these people, and the centrality of their shared experiences with friends new and old, with peers and strangers, and with all facets of themselves as complex and contradictory human beings.

Research contributions

As reported in **Chapter 1**, this thesis by publication aimed to better understanding of a contemporary research issue of interest to researchers and practitioners engaged with niche tourism. The overarching research question was examining the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. While the research opportunity was built

around this theoretical inquiry, the research itself capitalised upon the gay travel market to provide theoretical, thematic, and practical contributions and knowledge. By responding to the research question, this thesis not only provided a novel theoretical contribution to neo-tribalism, through enriching the theory and by providing a universal conceptualisation of its characteristics; it also created deeper understandings of tourism, especially in this context of gay travel. As indicated in Chapter 1, this research demonstrated that investing in the distinguishing qualities of a destination or business is instrumental for building neo-tribal loyalties, affiliations, and allegiances. By exploring the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory, the recommendations proposed by this thesis have potential applications in both academia and industry.

Part 1 of this thesis foregrounded the theoretical framework and the specific rationale advanced by the project. Part 1 consisted of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. While Chapter 2 explored the theoretical underpinnings of neo-tribal theory, Chapters 3 and 4 critically evaluated and reviewed the existing literature pertaining to gay travel.

In the first bridging chapter, **Chapter 2**, I reviewed the literature pertaining to neo-tribal theory and its arrival and applications in the field of tourism studies. The latter context provided the overarching rationale for this thesis by publication. The chapter explored various conceptualisations of neo-tribal characteristics, ranging from the seminal work of Maffesoli (1996) to more recent adaptations by scholars including Goulding and Shankar (2011) and Hardy, Gretzel and Hanson (2013). By reviewing the theory critically, and its work in imagining fluid social interconnection, I proposed four universal characteristics defining neo-tribal existence: a) fluidity in membership; b) shared sentiment; c) rituals and symbols; and d) space. A review of the literature revealed that the spatial characteristic of the theory

was under-researched, and that the theoretical knowledge around this aspect requires further development. As such, the characteristic of space became the focus of the thesis. I proposed that there is an exigent need to better understand the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. I proposed gay travel as a germane context for the expansion and enrichment of neo-tribal theory.

In **Chapter 3**, I reviewed the history of gay travel, and indicated its close relationship with the historical development of the LGBT liberation movement. The contribution of this chapter was threefold. First, it has established that the academic literature pertaining to the gay travel market has failed to progress in step with the wider, changing societal environment. As such, this promulgated a stereotypical and loosely-generalised imagining about the motivations of a modern gay traveller. Second, the existing literature has directed itself towards focusing on the demand-led aspects of the gay travel market, and neglected to investigate how the use and manipulation of gay space guides and attracts gay travellers and their travel behaviour. And third, the chapter concluded that gay travellers share a mutual connection through commonalities in lifestyles, histories and values, though these are by no means uniform. The chapter highlighted neo-tribal theory as a valuable tool for capturing sensitive knowledge and as complementary to this ethnographic project. The theory empowered this investigation of how gay travellers make decisions on their travel, as well as how they communicate with each other before, during and after the journey, and the way in which they use gay space to manifest and perform their identity. The chapter established that neo-tribal theory will provide insights into the use of space by modern gay travellers which exceed the understanding we possessed before.

Chapter 4 continued the sentiments expressed in Chapter 3, and explored the role and use of gay space. This chapter established that there is indeed a complimentary relationship between sexuality and space. It must be reiterated that gay spaces have various meanings to different groups of people in different contexts and situations, and that these meanings shift over time. I extended from this into the central argument of the paper, to assert that gay space can be not only a place around which like-minded people coalesce, but that it is also a potential catalyst for the transformation of how spaces are viewed, constructed, and reimagined. The chapter debunked the myth that sexual experiences play a primary role for gay travellers across the wider LGBT spectrum. Further to this, my review and analysis established that the bulk of the extant gay travel literature has failed to keep pace with societal and technological advancements, and has consequently misrepresented the profile of the 'typical' gay traveller. The contribution of this chapter was twofold. First, it reiterated and developed further the sentiments expressed in Chapter 3, that the gay travel market is made up of myriad segments and is indeed heterogeneous. And second, the paper asserted the need to revisit the motivational and behavioural assumptions made about gay travellers – across the breadth of people that term addresses – in response to our changing societal and technological environment.

The main argument advanced through Chapter 4 was that so-called 'gay space' may well be more fluid it its design than is imagined. As such, it does not exist independently from its wider social context; the meaning of gay spaces and gay holidays may themselves become more undefined and contestable, as broader social acceptance sees these demarcations become increasingly porous. This leaves an open door to hybridised and heterogeneous spaces, which remain 'gay'.

Part 2 of this thesis comprised Chapters 5 and 6. These chapters represented an extended methods section, and a discussion of my methodological, ontological and epistemological framework. This discussion was built in the first instance upon the research rationale outlined in Chapter 2, which emphasised the dearth of research into to the spatial characteristic of neo-tribal theory. These two methods chapters were built to address my research question, which addresses this need directly: what is the role of space as a point of coherence around which neo-tribes form. This broader methodological discussion follows from the exploration of the complex context of gay travel contained in Chapters 3 and 4, as all these facets are tightly intertwined.

In **Chapter 5** – the second bridging chapter – I outlined the methodological framework for my thesis by publication. Given the sensitive nature of this research, and the need to faithfully transmit the voices of those researched, this thesis adopted a critical stance and an ethnographic approach. The chapter built the specific case for ethnography as the methodological approach best aligned with neo-tribalism; it then advanced that alignment close even more so in the context of gay tourism. It was my intention to provide exhaustive background information which described the twin ethnographic methods I used: in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I detailed the participant selection process, presented a short, descriptive overview of the research environment and participant profiles. I then related the process through which I addressed ethical concerns, and provided the protections necessary to conduct an insider ethnography with a minority group.

In **Chapter 6**, I provided a critical account of my role as an insider researcher. The critical, or reflexive, stance in contemporary tourism research has developed through an ongoing

discussion of the roles of the researcher and of research participants, and the nature of the relationships between them (Ateljevic et al. 2005). This chapter responded to the call for more embedded and situated research, and where the divide between the pretence of objectivity and of the personal is blurred (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Dupuis 1999; Ren, Pritchard & Morgan 2010).

The chapter focused on the value of insider research, as developed through a specific ethnography at a gay resort in Far North Queensland, Australia. I posed the argument that there is a lack of critical ethnographic study pertaining to gay tourism, and a specific absence of understanding of exclusively-gay tourism spaces, such as gay resorts. I reflected further upon the course of action by which my methodological approach was shaped by my own position as a gay man, alongside my cultural and social upbringing. The chapter concluded by indicating that I, as a gay man, shared a similar worldview with the participants of the study, including and especially social norms and expectations, and that this similarity ensured my native-like immersion into the set environment. This resulted in more reflexive, perceptive and authentic research, where participants were permitted to express their morality without implied societal judgement or prejudice. Fundamentally, this chapter not only addressed the gap left by the dearth of ethnographic inquiry into gay tourism, but also contributed to neo-tribal theory by showcasing that the lived experience of ephemeral groupings – neo-tribes – can be captured through the use of short-term ethnography.

The synthesis of theory and context developed through Chapters 2, 3, and 4 enables a deeper exploration of space and neo-tribalism in **Part 3** of this thesis. My analysis builds upon and extends the argument by Hughson (1999, p. 14), who affirmed that ‘an awareness

of the social and cultural geography of relevant spaces is […] crucial to the study of neo-tribes'. Chapters 7 and 8 contributed not just in their enrichment of the theory of neo-tribalism, but strengthened its position as a robust framework for the study of tourists' behaviour and their experiences. These two chapters uncovered the fundamental significance of the spatial characteristic of the theory in two major ways. First, these chapters provided evidence that space is the binding characteristic tying neo-tribes together. And secondly, they captured the contours of these ephemeral groupings, and detailed how the removal of the space characteristic would disintegrate the entire neo-tribal quality and reality, through the impossibility of cultural manifestation without space as stage and gathering place.

Chapter 7 of this thesis by publication outlined the first set of findings. By focussing upon everyday holiday experiences of gay resort visitors, the chapter analysed the intimate engagement and interplay between the resort space and the resort's patrons. The main argument and contribution of this chapter was that spaces are the sites of performance where collective identities and cultures are manifested. Simultaneously, they are themselves formed by and formative of these identities, unstable spatial delineations re-align with unstable identity boundaries, and vice versa. The chapter asserted further that the fleeting nature of neo-tribal membership is itself enabling. It depicts a transient and transitory escape from day-to-day routines. The chapter proposes that space not only mediates, but produces and governs the rituals and symbols, fluid membership, and shared sentiments which underlie neo-tribal experience. Ultimately, space is represented as the linking value which makes these other characteristics legible and real.

The chapter concludes by articulating the opportunity for tourism operators to encourage customer loyalty and repeat business through the deliberate cultivation of neo-tribal characteristics, as enacted through the deliberate manipulation of space.

Having explored the fundaments of space as a characteristic of neo-tribal theory, **Chapter 8** progressed to analysis of this characteristic in intimate detail. The chapter sought to record the contours of the neo-tribe found at the resort, to relate this to my broader theoretical formulation, and to determine the mechanism and process of neo-tribal dissipation, in its distinctive quality, membership, and constructed reality. The chapter examined the collective behaviour of gay resort visitors, and capitalised upon the enclosed resort space as an accessible microcosm of dynamic neo-tribal affiliations and gatherings. It postulated that the gay resort contained meaning to its clientele as an imagined place of return, and an idyll always accessible to gay men from their 'real' lives. Consequently, resort visitors could entrench the divide between their resort lives and their 'real' selves, and then draw on this division as a source of strength and solidarity outside the resort space; the resort becomes an imaginary once departed, but gives its patrons a continuing sense of belonging and continuity through its reification of a gay social ideal. The neo-tribe of the resort granted its members ownership of territory, and with it permission to imagine alternative and transcendent socialities. Through this chapter, I established that space is elevated in its relationship to neo-tribes, and that feelings of collective ownership by the tribe of their space are constitutive of tribal identity itself; entry into and shared ownership of tribal space is in some sense the currency of tribal membership and belonging. The overarching argument was that as space becomes the linking value of a neo-tribe, tribe dissipates and

endures no longer once this shared environment is taken away. This finding makes a major contribution to the understanding of neo-tribal theory in the academic literature.

Limitations and future research

The highly specific nature of the fieldwork described in this thesis proves a point, but itself must be regarded as a limitation. While the literature reviewed established the importance of gay spaces to gay peoples and cultures (see Chapters 3 and 4), my work has deepened these linkages, and situated it within the theoretical framework of neo-tribalism. Its highly situated nature – one entirely contained gay resort space, and its patrons at this time of year – provided localised and cross-sectional knowledge, and this was a useful and incisive means of interrogating the connections between gay space and the neo-tribal theory. It cannot however account for how space might itself be constructed differently within different environments and cultures, and the influences this might have on neo-tribal formation and function. And while neo-tribes themselves are highly temporally specific, given their ephemeral nature, a longer-term ethnography or a study which followed users of gay space over the life-course might have increased explanatory power as to the significance of gay space, and how this is changing within a rapidly liberalising cultural frame. Furthermore, a longitudinal study potentially could be better able to discuss patterns of formation and dissolution, and as such contribute to a wider discussion pertaining to the role of time in neo-tribal creation.

This short-term ethnography used participant observation in combination with semi-structured interviews. These interviews used insider positionality to quickly build rapport

with participants, and the intimacy of these data catalysed theoretical saturation. It should be noted that the convenience sample used here may not have accounted for all conceivable biases, such as self-selection and the willingness or otherwise to disclose highly personal information to an interviewer while speaking face-to-face, even if these data are later anonymised. A further study may wish to more precisely adjust for these biases through the use of mixed methods; an anonymous questionnaire in combination with semi-structured interviews is one such possibility, as is an observation method, which was used in this study.

One disadvantage of insider positionality – and as discussed in Chapter 6 – is that the findings of this research become difficult to extricate from my own identity markers, which may influence what was disclosed to me, and by whom. As an able-bodied, young gay male, who is educated, who comes from overseas, and enjoys material privilege compared to the great majority of people in the world, I represent a specific and advantaged viewpoint. In several respects, I was similar to the people I interviewed. While I have attempted to be reflexive, I cannot speak to the experience of a woman at the gay resort, a straight person, a transman or woman. I was further a white man among a predominantly white resort clientele. To some extent, I have advocated for insider positionality as an expedient way to understand neo-tribal formation. For other, it may have been far more difficult to access these spaces and relationships, and this distinction should be acknowledged.

Through the methodological discussion it was established that quantitative methods alone struggle to depict the intricacies of neo-tribes (Cova & Cova 2002; Greenacre, Freeman & Donald 2013), but a mixed-methods design may be able to use the rigour of quantitative enquiry to triangulate and test results, and to control for inaccuracies in selection and

willingness to disclose, and to increase generalisability of the data by producing more finely-grained demographic data. While this discussion of limitations does raise some interesting possibilities for further enquiry, what is being proposed here is a much larger project than was within the scope of this PhD by publication. Extending a survey into gay space across multiple spaces and cultures, through the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data, and through longitudinal research, would be an unavoidably complex and expensive undertaking.

Perhaps the largest question that remains unaddressed is whether gay spaces will retain their currency and importance in the decades to come. While the salience of the dream and reality of gay-exclusive spaces has been established here, the Australia of today would be very much unrecognisable to its gay citizenry of thirty years ago, let alone the decades and centuries before. Whether the long shadow of gay assimilationism and the new homonormativity will allow such spaces to survive, or indeed give them any reason to persist, cannot be established or commented upon by my research. The is an essentially generational component to this field of research; a generation of gay men lost to HIV/AIDS is being followed by a generation who have never known the disease as a mortal threat, and similar paradigm shifts in gay experience may be yet to come. What does gay space mean to a generation raised when gay marriage was always normal, or to whom sexual orientation has no political content? What is the future of neo-tribal association to generations who have always known the boundless and omnipresent connectivity of the internet, and whichever defining technologies of the future are yet to come? These challenging questions demand innovative methodologies and modes of enquiry, with digital ethnography one such promising approach.

As the researcher, I suggest there is a renewed need for the other characteristics of neo-tribal theory to be investigated and evaluated in light of my findings. By placing space at the centre of tribal coalescence, important assertions have been made as to the linkages and interplay between the rituals and symbols, shared sentiment, and fluidity in membership which typify neo-tribal existence. Further tourism scholarship may leverage these findings, and develop the theory further to elucidate these interconnections, the spatial fundament of neo-tribalism, and its other characteristics in greater depth and detail.

Conclusion

This PhD by publication offers a deeper understanding of the nature of neo-tribes. Its primary focus was the characteristic of space, which was a component of all conceptualisations of neo-tribes, and was present in Maffesoli's initial formulation, but had remained underdeveloped in the literature. My overarching research question was to uncover the role of space as the point of coherence around which neo-tribes formed. In the service of answering this question, this research sought an intimate understanding on one tourism space and its unique inhabitants: a gay resort in Far North Queensland, Australia.

I truly hope that you, as a reader, feel that you have gained a genuine and deeper understanding of these people through my ethnography. I hope too that you take neo-tribalism with you, as a powerful tool for the observation and understanding of how people build collective meaning in a complex and dynamic world. Neo-tribalism is a rejection of social atomisation in societies where – on first glance – it seems we have no time to find meaning in each other, and where the inner experiences of those hailing from different

walks of life are inaccessible to us. Neo-tribes use space as a means of re-establishing ownership, solidity, and locality, and to share these blessing and dividends with people different from ourselves; here, space becomes the very fulcrum of neo-tribal coalescence.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview schedule for the resort visitors

Tasmanian School of Business and Economics

Exploring Gay Tourist Space: A Neo-tribal Approach

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for the Resort Visitors

Section 1: Semi Structured Interview Questions

1.1. So tell me about how your trip is going so far? Are you having a good time? Is this your first stay at this resort?

1.2. What are the main reasons that have motivated you to come and stay at Lizard Bay Resort[10], instead of other resort?

1.3. Tell me about your typical day at the resort is like? What are your favourite things to do?

1.4. How does this resort influence the quality of your holiday?

1.5. What are some words you would use to describe how you feel while on holiday at this resort?

[10] Pseudonym used to avoid making reference to the name of the resort.

1.6. After holiday, do you keep in touch with other resort visitors?

1.7. How does your behaviour change when you come from your routine life to the resort?

1.8. What attracts other people to come and stay at this gay and lesbian resort?

1.9. What in your opinion are the key features of this gay and lesbian resort?

1.10. While on holidays at the resort what other activities do you perform outside the Resort?

Section 2: Demographic Data

2.1. Age _____

2.2. Sex _____

2.3. Sexual identity (this question will be asked only if it was not specified by the participant him- or herself in the Section 1 of this Interview Schedule, if it was specified by the participant the researcher will fill in this section accordingly).

_____

2.4. Occupation _____

2.5. Post Code _____

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

Tasmanian School of Business and Economics

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

Exploring Gay Tourist Space: A Neo-tribal Approach

Statement by the Participant of the Interview

1. I agree to take part in the research study named above.
2. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
3. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
4. I understand that the study involves up to 60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I understand that I have an opportunity to review the transcript of my own interview and propose corrections prior to the commencement of data analysis stage.
5. I understand that participation involves the risk that can evoke anxiety. I understand that I have a right to decline to answer to a particular question and/or withdraw from the interview at any time without any effect.
6. I understand that all research data will be securely stored on the Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, University of Tasmania premises for five years from the publication of the study results, and will then be destroyed.
7. Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.
8. I understand that the researcher(s) will maintain confidentiality and that any information I supply to the researcher(s) will be used only for the purposes of the research.

9. I understand that the results of the study will be published so that I cannot be identified as a participant.
10. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any effect.

    If I so wish, I may request to withdraw any data that I have supplied before the 31st October, 2014.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Statement by Investigator

☐ I have explained the project and the implications of participation in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

If the Investigator has not had an opportunity to talk to participants prior to them participating, the following must be ticked.

☐ The participant has received the Information Sheet where my details have been provided so participants have had the opportunity to contact me prior to consenting to participate in this project.

Investigator's name: _____

Investigator's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet

Tasmanian School of Business and Economics

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

Exploring Gay Tourist Space: A Neo-tribal Approach

Dear Participant,

1. Invitation

This study invites you to participate in an interview that is part of the study aiming to explore the use of 'gay space' and gain an in-depth understanding of the motivations, behaviour and culture of gay and lesbian resort visitors.

This study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree for Mr. Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta under the supervision of Dr Anne Hardy, Dr Alison Dunn, Dr Brady Robards and Dr Gemma Lewis.

2. What is the purpose of this study?

The aim of this research is to understand the role of gay tourist spaces and places (like resorts) as sites for a shared sense of belonging, interactions and behaviours. The project is investigating how travellers communicate and interact whilst on holiday at a gay and lesbian resort. It also aims to explore whether a particular space – Lizard Bay Gay and Lesbian Resort[11] – stimulates visitors to behave, feel and act in a different way than they usually would in their day-to-day routines. This will provide insights into future travel behaviours of gay and lesbian resort visitors.

3. Why have I been invited to participate?

The study is open to anyone visiting or staying at Lizard Bay Gay and Lesbian Resort. Your involvement in this study is voluntary and there are no consequences if you decide not to

[11] Pseudonym used to avoid making reference to the name of the resort.

participate. If you are a staff member at Lizard Bay Resort, declining participation in this study will not affect your employment at Lizard Bay Resort.

4. What will I be asked to do?

Participants will be asked to meet with the researcher for 45 – 60 minutes in a casual, one-on-one interview at a convenient place at Lizard Bay Resort to talk about their experience at the resort as well as factors that have motivated them to come and stay at this particular resort. There will be questions asked that aim to discover the motivations that trigger participants to travel, to this resort specifically, as well as questions in relation to their behaviour while on holiday.

The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed in the later stages of this study. Participants have an opportunity to review the transcript and propose corrections prior to the commencement of data analysis.

Direct quotes expressed by the participant might be used and published in the later stages of the research. However, data collected from a participant through the interview method will be de-identified and treated confidentially. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. A file linking participants' names to pseudonyms will be stored on a password-protected computer separate from the transcripts of the interview and only the researchers will have access to this material.

5. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?

This project will provide participants an opportunity to reflect upon and discuss their own holidaying experience, motivations and habits. Moreover, the results of this study will contribute to our knowledge of gay tourism. There is no financial benefit for the participants to take part in this project.

6. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?

While this is not anticipated, there is a low chance that participants undertaking interviews might experience anxiety as a result of knowing that their actions, behaviours and responses are monitored during the process of the interview. Participants are advised that they have a right to decline to answer the particular question and/or withdraw from the interview at any time. Interview participants will be offered an opportunity to view and amend their own transcripts of interviews as outlined in Section 7 of this Information Sheet.

7. What if I change my mind during or after the study?

Participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any time without any negative effects and without providing an explanation. In case of termination of the interview by the participant, participant should specify that he or she wishes to withdraw the already provided data.

After the completion of an interview, the participant has the right to request to withdraw any data he or she has supplied.

8. What will happen to the information when this study is over?

All of the data obtained during the process of interview will be treated in a confidential manner.

All hard copies of data including notes taken during the interview will be stored in Mr. Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta's office in locked cabinet at the Tasmanian School of Business and Economics, University of Tasmania. Digital audio-recordings will be password protected and stored on a secure server at the Tasmanian School of Business and Education, Sandy Bay campus. Files that might connect participants' names and codes will be stored separately from the data on the same server.

Hard copies of the data along with any electronic data will be destroyed no sooner than 5 years from the publication of PhD thesis.

9. How will the results of the study be published?

As this study is being conducted in partial fulfilment of a PhD degree for Mr. Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta, the findings will be published in the PhD thesis. It is anticipated that the PhD thesis will be completed and ready to be published in February, 2016. Study findings will be also disseminated through publications and presentations at academic conferences.

Participants will be assigned pseudonyms so they will not be directly identified in the dissemination of findings.

Upon request, participants will have an opportunity to receive a summary of the research results by contacting Mr Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta (Oskaras.Pinta@utas.edu.au).

10. What if I have questions about this study?

If you have any queries or would like clarification about this study please contact the Student Investigator, Mr. Oskaras Vorobjovas-Pinta (Oskaras.Pinta@utas.edu.au) or the Chief Investigator, Dr Anne Hardy (Anne.Hardy@utas.edu.au).

This study has been approved by the Tasmanian Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, please contact the Executive Officer of the HREC (Tasmania) Network on +61 3 6226 6254 or email human.ethics@utas.edu.au. The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. Please quote ethics reference number H14212.

This information sheet is for you to keep. If you would like to participate, there is a separate consent form for you to sign.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 4: Leaflet/poster inviting potential participants to take part in the study

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

Please share your holiday experiences!

From Tuesday 2nd September - Monday 13th October, the University of Tasmania will be conducting social research at Lizard Bay Beach Resort.

The goal of this research is to understand more about your holiday experiences and interactions at this resort. The research will involve a 45-60 minute interview, and is entirely confidential and voluntary. All guests are welcome to participate.

For further information please contact the reception desk, or email Oscar at **Oskaras.Pinta@utas.edu.au**